



★ The Episcopal Diocese *of Texas*

Safeguarding God's Children

Policies for the Protection of Children and Youth

epicenter.org/safeguarding
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2022



★ The Episcopal Diocese of Texas

Dear People of the Diocese of Texas,

One of the things that the Covid-19 pandemic has taught us is the immeasurable value of our relationships with one another. Safeguarding is about taking the steps necessary to protect those relationships from behaviors that can lead to abuse, exploitation, or neglect and about taking appropriate action when healthy boundaries have been crossed.

It's a changing world, and we continue to grow as a diocese in our understanding of what it means to provide nurturing and respectful environments for people in all their diversity, whether we gather in person or virtually. One thing is certain; we are called to love as Christ loved us. Through our daily awareness and practice of Safeguarding, we offer communities where people of all ages can know that they are valued and loved. In a world too frequently marred by hatred and division, I can't imagine a more precious gift. I am deeply grateful for your partnership in this holy work.

Faithfully,

IX Bishop of Texas

About These Policies

This document is a statement of general expectations of behavior in the Episcopal Diocese of Texas from clergy, lay employees, volunteers, and groups when engaged in ministry with children and youth. These policies are mandated for all ministries and programs of diocesan congregations, schools, and other organizations of the Episcopal Diocese of Texas.

No policy can foresee every possible circumstance to which it may be applied. Any additions or modifications by local leadership to these policies may be made only with the written approval of the [Safeguarding Minister](#).

Application of These Policies

These policies apply to all congregations, schools, and other organizations that operate under the authority of the Episcopal Diocese of Texas.

These policies address ministry with children and youth. Ministry with adults are covered by The Episcopal Diocese of Texas, *Safeguarding God's People: Policies for Safe Ministry with Adults*.

Responsibility for Implementation

The heads of congregations, the heads of schools, executive directors, and any other person serving in these or equivalent roles in diocesan organizations are directly responsible to the Bishop for the implementation and administration of the policies and procedures outlined in *Safeguarding God's Children: Policies for the Protection of Children and Youth*.

The implementation and administration of these policies and procedures may be delegated to other staff members or volunteers, but *the ultimate responsibility may not be delegated*. Supervision of these administrative processes by the Head of Organization is required to assure appropriate compliance and confidentiality.

Table of Contents

<u>Section I. Definitions</u>	6
A. Age Categories	6
B. Personnel	6
C. Terms	7
<u>Section II. Creating Safe and Healthy Environments</u>	9
A. Behavioral Standards for Personnel	9
B. Sexual Activity Between Children/Youth	11
C. Basic Needs	11
D. First Aid and Medications	12
E. Discrimination and Harassment.....	12
F. Bullying.....	12
G. Weapons and Violence	13
H. Alcohol	13
<u>Section III. Monitoring and Supervision of Programs</u>	13
A. Accessibility of Information	13
B. Approval and Tracking of Activities	14
C. Responsible Person.....	14
D. Two Adults Rule	14
E. Unanticipated Circumstances	15
F. Unrelated Persons.....	15
G. Ratios	15
H. Release	15
I. Visibility and Security	16
J. Private Activities	16
1. No adult may shower, bathe, or use restroom in the presence of children or youth.....	16
2. Supervising dressing, showering, or diapering	16
3. Safe restrooms, locker rooms, and shower facilities.....	16
4. Diapering.....	16
5. Age-Appropriate Restroom Supervision	16
K. Virtual Ministry, Social Media, and Digital Communications	18
L. Teaching Children and Youth to Keep Themselves Safe	20
<u>Section IV. Prior Parental Approval and Registration, Waiver, and Release Forms</u>	20
A. Prior Approval by Parent.....	20

B. Registration, Waiver and Release Forms	20
Section V. Off-Site Events, Travel, and Overnight Events	20
A. Prior Approval of Off-Site Events	20
B. Adult Supervision	21
C. Additional Rules for Travel.....	21
D. Transporting Children and Youth.....	22
E. Overnight Events.....	22
Section VI. Code of Conduct	23
Section VII. Safeguarding Certification Requirements.....	24
A. Certifications	24
B. Deadlines, Recertification, and Transfers of Location	25
C. Certification Exceptions	26
1. Parent Volunteers.....	26
2. Youth Helpers	26
3. Training Only Agreements (Schools & Vendors).....	26
4. Tutors and Independent Instructors.....	27
Section VIII. Reporting.....	28
A. Suspected Abuse of Children or Youth	28
B. Behaviors Inconsistent with Policies.....	29
C. Diocesan Contacts/Intake Officers.....	30
D. Methods for Reporting.....	30
E. Reporting Protection.....	30
F. Investigation and Enforcement.....	30
Appendix Guidance in Reporting Neglect or Abuse of Children or Youth	31

I. Definitions

A. Age Categories

1. A **child** is defined as anyone under the age of 12 years.
2. A **youth** is defined as anyone who is at least 12 years old, but not yet 18 years old and also includes anyone who is 18 years old or older and still in high school.
3. An **adult** is defined as anyone who is 18 years or older who is not in high school and who is not a vulnerable adult.
4. A **vulnerable adult** is defined as anyone who is 18 years or older who has special needs of a physical, age-related or mental nature.

B. Personnel

The following are included in the definition of Personnel when they are functioning in their respective roles for the diocese or for a diocesan organization. **These individuals must complete screening and training in Safeguarding God's Children (SGC) as set out in *Section VII*:**

1. **All members of the clergy** whether stipendiary, non-stipendiary, canonically resident in this diocese, or licensed in this diocese, who are engaged in ministry or service.
2. **All employees**, full or part time, whether employed in areas of ministry or other kinds of services by the diocese or diocesan organizations, whether or not the employees work directly with children. An exception may be made by the Safeguarding Minister for employees of an organization when the entire organization has no contact with children or youth in the course of its ministry.
3. **Vendors** (those who are not employees but contract their services to the diocese or diocesan organizations) who routinely work with or around children or youth, unless their only contact with children or youth is during a worship service where children and youth are being supervised by other adults. For any other exception, consult with the [Safeguarding Minister](#).
4. **Volunteers serving in staff positions** whether full time or part time, regardless of whether they work with children or youth.
5. **All persons with general key or code access to locked buildings** where children or youth may be present without adequate adult supervision. See also *Section III.B.3*.
6. **Volunteers in activities for children and youth**, including any person who offers to serve in activities for children and youth or who actually assists with such activities.

7. **All volunteers whose work routinely takes them throughout the facility or grounds** when children or youth are present, other than during an activity or worship service where the children and youth are being supervised by other adults. For any other exception, consult with the [Safeguarding Minister](#).
8. **Youth who assist in ministries or programs** for children or youth such as camp, Vacation Bible School, childcare, mission trips, or retreats.

Examples of Personnel include, but are not limited to:

- Children's or youth choir directors
- Sunday school teachers and staff
- Vacation Bible School/Camp teachers and staff
- Lay youth formation directors and directors of Christian education
- Nursery workers
- All adults who supervise children in any capacity
- Teachers, substitute teachers, and staff in parochial or other Episcopal schools, full or part-time, contract or volunteer
- Adults who participate in overnight activities with children or youth
- Security guards or regular maintenance persons who work with or around children

C. Terms

Abuse: Includes **physical abuse** (non-accidental injury intentionally inflicted upon a child or youth, **sexual abuse** (any sexual contact, indecency, or activity of a sexual nature with a minor), and **emotional abuse** (mental or emotional injury to a child or youth that results in an observable and material impairment in the child's or youth's growth, development, or psychological functioning).

Bullying: Behavior that intimidates, humiliates, offends, degrades, or harms another person, whether verbally, psychologically, or physically.

Clergy in Charge: A member of the clergy who is in charge of a program for children and youth. In a congregation, this is the head of the congregation unless the head has appointed another clergy staff member as the Clergy in Charge of a program.

Diocese: The Episcopal Diocese of Texas

Head of Organization: The person who is the canonical head of a congregation or the chief executive officer of an organization, such as a head of school or executive director.

Intake Officer: The person(s) designated by the diocese to receive information regarding an offense for which a member of the clergy may be held accountable under *Title IV of the*

Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church, which sets out the disciplinary process for clergy. Anyone may contact an Intake Officer to report concerns.

LGBTQ+: An acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, and others. It refers to people whose gender identities vary from their sex assigned at birth, or whose sexual orientation differs from the heterosexual majority. The “+” is an effort to include gender non-binary and other gender identities that do not conform to traditional gender categories. This is an evolving term.

Mandated Reporter: A person who is required by state law to report reasonable suspicions of abuse, neglect, and/or exploitation of vulnerable populations to the appropriate state agency. Under Texas law, all adults are mandatory reporters of suspected abuse of children or youth.

Neglect: The failure to provide for a child’s or youth’s basic needs and/or medical needs or to take action to protect a child or youth from harm.

Off-Site: Any location other than the facility of the diocese or diocesan organization in which the ministry is based.

Organizations: All institutions authorized by the diocese or its congregations, including fellowships, missional communities, college ministries, schools, camps, retreat centers, and social service organizations.

Overnight: Any event that starts on one calendar day and ends on a different calendar day.

Peer Abuse: Any bullying or abuse occurring between children, between a child and a youth, or between youth.

Programs: Official activities and programs sponsored by the diocese or its organizations. Programs expressly include troops of **The Boy Scouts of America (BSA)**, because the BSA requires troops to be chartered by the church or other organization.

Responsible Person: The person designated as being accountable for compliance with this policy for an event or program. Such person must be (i) an adult who has been trained and screened under these policies and (ii) physically present during the event.

Sacramental Use: Consecrated or unconsecrated wine used in the setting of Eucharist.

Supervisor: A person who has oversight responsibilities for a ministry program and/or Personnel in a ministry program. The Supervisor may or may not be the Clergy in Charge and/or the Responsible Person.

Title IV: A section of the *Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church* pertaining to clergy professional standards, accountability, and ecclesiastical discipline.

Training: An organized activity designed to provide information and/or instructions to strengthen and enhance the recipient's understanding, capacity, and exercise of ministry.

Transgender: An adjective describing a person whose sense of gender identity does not correspond with the gender or sex they were assigned at birth. This is an evolving term, as our understanding and language around gender identity and sexuality expands and matures.

Travel: An event for children and youth that involves spending the night in multiple locations over more than two calendar days.

Youth Helper: A youth who assists adult Personnel in a program involving children and youth.

II. Creating Safe and Healthy Environments

A. Behavioral Standards for Personnel

These guidelines will help identify and prevent behaviors and interactions which may be used to “groom” children, youth, and their parents, or which may create conditions where abuse by adults or peers can more easily occur. They are not designed or intended to address interactions within families.

1. Personnel will **offer a positive role model by treating children and youth with patience and with equal respect and consideration**, regardless of sex, race, religion, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or socio-economic status. Ways of showing respect and consideration may include taking into account differing levels of abilities when planning activities, correctly pronouncing unfamiliar names, using stated pronouns, allowing for the expression of cultural differences, and taking care not to show favoritism.
2. Personnel will **conduct any one-to-one talks** with children and youth in an open or public place where private conversations are possible but occur in full view of others. A Responsible Person shall be informed in advance about any planned conversations. When such conversation is unplanned, the Responsible Person shall be informed as soon as practical.
3. **Personnel are encouraged to offer appropriate displays of affection that respect physical, emotional, and behavioral boundaries**, including but not limited to the following examples:

- High fives and fist bumps
 - Handholding while walking with small children or in prayer
 - Brief touching of shoulders, hands, or arms
 - “Laying on of hands” and/or anointing under appropriate pastoral supervision
 - Brief hugs and arms around shoulders
4. Personnel **shall not engage in behaviors that cross physical, emotional, and behavioral boundaries**, including but not limited to the following examples:
- Any unwanted form of physical affection
 - Inappropriate or lengthy embraces
 - Kisses on the mouth
 - Holding children over 3 years old on the lap
 - Touching bottoms, chests, or genital areas other than appropriate diapering and toileting of infants/toddlers
 - Showing affection in isolated areas such as bedrooms, staff-only areas
 - Touching knees or legs, wrestling, or tickling children or youth
 - Piggyback rides
 - Any type of massage given by a child or youth to an adult
 - Any type of massage given by an adult to children or youth
 - Snapping bras, giving “wedgies,” or similar touching of underwear
 - Comments or compliments (spoken, written or electronic) about physique or body development
 - Giving money or gifts to individual children or youth
 - Private meals with individual children or youth
 - Inappropriate interaction on social media (See *Section III.K.*)
5. Personnel who develop **private relationships** with children or youth outside of ministry activities (e.g., using youth as babysitters or for yard maintenance) will (i) do so only with the permission of parents or guardians and (ii) notify the Program Supervisor or Responsible Person of the program in which the Personnel and child or youth are involved.
6. Personnel **shall not use, possess, distribute, or be under the influence** of alcohol or illegal drugs, or misuse legal drugs or prescription medications while participating in or assisting with programs or activities specifically for children and youth. See also the diocesan [Alcohol Policy](#).

7. Personnel **shall not provide children or youth with non-sacramental alcohol, marijuana, drugs, tobacco products, e-cigarettes, vapes, or pornography.** See also *Section II.H.* below and the diocesan [Alcohol Policy](#).
8. Personnel **shall not engage in sexual contact with a child or youth or become romantically involved** with a child or youth.
9. Personnel **shall not possess, download, or view any sexually oriented or explicit materials** on the property of the diocese or any organization or in the presence of children and youth (with the exception of sexually oriented materials that are part of an educational program that is pre-authorized by the diocese or the Head of Organization).
10. Personnel **shall not discuss their own sexual activities**, including dreams and fantasies, or discuss with children or youth their use of sexually oriented or explicit materials such as pornography, videos, or materials.
11. Personnel **shall not sleep in the same bed** or sleeping bag with children or youth unless the adult is an immediate family member.
12. Personnel **shall not use physical punishment** in any way for behavior management of children and youth, including spanking, slapping, pinching, or any other physical force. Physical force may only be used to stop behavior that may cause immediate harm to the child or to others.
13. Personnel **shall not use harsh language**, profanity, degrading language or punishment, or any mechanical restraint for behavior management.

B. Sexual Activity Between Children/Youth

Although not all sexual activity between children or youth is abuse, sexual activity of any kind between children or youth is not appropriate in connection with activities sponsored by the diocese or organization, regardless of where it takes place. Personnel must intervene to stop such activity by a child or youth and report it immediately as a policy violation and may need to report it as abuse. (See *Section VIII.*)

C. Basic Needs

No one is to be deprived of the basic human needs of food, drinking water, shelter, adequate

sleep, access to restrooms, safety, and clothing at any event. Adequate sleep means the opportunity to sleep for at least 7 hours.

Exceptions may be made for programs intended to teach children or youth about poverty, needs, and hunger, such as an intentional fasting program. In these cases, children and youth must agree to participate in writing, and parents or guardians must give written permission that includes certification that the youth or child does not have a medical condition that would put the participant at risk by fasting or missing sleep. Participants who wish to withdraw or who are unable to complete the program must have their basic needs met immediately.

D. First Aid and Medications

At all activities for youth or children, the following rules apply:

1. **First Aid Kit:** An appropriately stocked first aid kit shall be available in an easily accessible location.
2. **Medications:** All medications (prescription and over the counter) belonging to minors shall be given to the Responsible Person, unless otherwise agreed upon by the parents and the Responsible Person. Recommended exceptions include inhalers and epi-pens. Subject to the above exception, the Responsible Person or the Responsible Person's adult designee shall administer all medications.
3. **Records:** A record must be kept for all medications or first aid given to a participant that includes; the name of the person administering the medication or treatment, a description of the medication, dosage, and time of medication/treatment.
4. **Current Certification:** Current certification in First Aid, CPR, and Automated External Defibrillator (AED) is encouraged for persons working with children and youth.

E. Discrimination and Harassment

The Episcopal Diocese of Texas prohibits discrimination or harassment toward any person based on race, color, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, age, religion, or disabilities. Personnel must report immediately incidents of discrimination or harassment under the provisions of *Section VIII*.

F. Bullying

Bullying violates a person's sense of worth and his or her immeasurable value to God. Bullying is manifested in various ways: abusive language, offensive name calling, acts or threats of physical

abuse, vandalism, theft, or destruction of property. Bullying of all forms, including bullying or bullying based on sexual orientation or gender identification or expression, inhibit a person's ability to feel safe in our organizations. Bullying of any form will not be tolerated in organizations of the Episcopal Diocese of Texas. Personnel must report incidents of bullying under the provisions of *Section VIII*.

G. Weapons and Violence

1. **General Weapons Policy:** The Episcopal Diocese of Texas does not permit any person, including clergy, staff, students, volunteers, and visitors, to carry a weapon in our churches, congregations, schools, or organizations. This prohibition applies even if the person is licensed to carry a concealed weapon under Texas laws. Law enforcement officers are the only exception to this policy. There are three ways to give legal notice that the property is a gun free zone: (1) signs posted at entrances, (2) a printed card or other written communication and (3) oral communications. Notification details can be found here: [Gun Law and Policy](#). Personnel must report violations of this policy under the provisions of *Section IX*.
2. **Specific Weapons Policy Involving Children and Youth:** Children and youth shall not have weapons of any kind, or items which may easily be used as weapons (e.g., pocketknives, machetes, bows and arrows, etc.), at any event or program for children and youth except as expressly permitted in camp programs or other programs with prior approval from the Head of Organization.
3. **Violence:** No one is to strike, hit, or otherwise physically threaten or harm anyone at any time at activities involving children or youth.

H. Alcohol

All alcohol, including alcohol for sacramental use, must be stored in an area inaccessible to children and youth. Alcohol may not be served at events designed for children and youth except for sacramental use. (See also *Section II.A.7*. above and the diocesan [Alcohol Policy](#))

III. Monitoring and Supervision of Programs

Personnel must monitor and supervise programs for children and youth so that inappropriate behaviors by adults, youth, and other children can be detected and stopped. The following rules apply whether or not the programs take place on property belonging to the diocese or organization.

A. Accessibility of Information

The Policies for the Protection of Children and Youth shall be posted in an area where activities for children or youth take place, **along with the names and phone numbers of the member of the Clergy in Charge (if applicable), the Program Supervisor, the Head of Organization, and** (in the case of a congregation) **a Warden**. Such information shall also be given to all parents, guardians, and Personnel.

B. Approval and Tracking of Activities and People with Access

1. **No new activities for children and youth** shall be developed **without written approval** of the Head of Organization (or in the case of the diocese, of the person in the bishop's office who oversees programs for children and youth). Requests for new activities must be in writing so that the head can assure that any activity includes adequate adult supervision.
2. An **up-to-date list** of approved programs for children and youth will be maintained by the diocese or organization in the office where such records are kept.
3. An **up-to-date list of people with general key or code access** to the buildings of the organization will be maintained by the diocese or organization in the office where such records are kept.

C. Responsible Person

For every youth or children's event, whether held in person or on a virtual platform, a **Responsible Person (as defined in Section I.C.) shall be appointed** by the Program Supervisor. The "on site" requirement is met in an online gathering by being present on the virtual platform.

D. Two Adults Rule

Except as provided in *Section V.B.* (with respect to off-site events and travel), at least **two unrelated adult Personnel (who are at least two years older than the eldest participant)** shall be present at ministry settings and events designed for children or youth, including live ministry events held on virtual platforms.

Only one adult Personnel may be sufficient in a well-monitored, visually accessible program space on the grounds of the diocese or organization, provided that other adult Personnel can maintain visual contact with the lone adult (such as by frequent random checks of classrooms).

Only one adult Personnel may be sufficient on a virtual platform, provided that at least one other adult Personnel has the information necessary to make frequent and random checks of the

ministry event or that such event is recorded and the recording kept in a location where it can be viewed by the Program Supervisor and Head of Organization.

Any such exception to the Two Adults Rule must be described in writing and approved by the Head of Organization and the Program Supervisor.

E. Unanticipated Circumstances

If unanticipated circumstances result in **an adult's being alone with children or youth**, that adult shall report those circumstances to the Responsible Person, Supervisor, and Clergy in Charge as soon as possible. This rule also applies to online interactions on virtual platforms.

F. Unrelated Persons

The Two Adult Rule is not met by two people who are related to each other as immediate family members. An immediate family member is defined as the parent, child, sibling, grandparent, spouse, partner, or co-habitant. Immediate family members whose relationships are created by marriage (in-laws and step-relationships) are also included. Related persons may minister together so long as at least one other unrelated adult is present who has been screened and trained under these policies.

G. Ratios

The following adult to child/youth ratios must be observed for in-person events:

1. **Schools or camps** that are accredited or licensed may observe the adult to child ratio as established by the accrediting or licensing agency.
2. **For any other program or activity (with the exception of the requirements for travel in Section V.B.2.), the following adult to child ratios must be maintained:**

Infants (0-11 mo.)	1:3 (one adult to three infants)
1-5 years	1:5 for overnight participants and 1:6 for day participants
6-8 years	1:6 overnight and 1:8 day
9-14 years	1:8 overnight and 1:10 day
15-18 years	1:10 overnight and 1:12 day

H. Release

Programs for infants and children under six years old must have procedures to ensure that children are released only to their parents or to those designated by their parents or guardians.

I. Visibility and Security

Classrooms or other areas used by children or youth **must have windows or a window in the door so that casual monitoring can occur**. At least one window must be **unobstructed by blinds, curtains, drapes, or posters, except during a lock-down drill or an active security threat**. Doors of occupied classrooms must be unlocked at all times during activities, except doors may be locked from the inside in occupied classrooms when recommended as a security measure by law enforcement or a security audit. Unused rooms should be locked or monitored.

J. Private Activities

Each program will follow procedures to ensure the safety of children and youth using restrooms, locker rooms, showers, or baths and during diapering.

1. No adult may shower, bathe, or use restroom facilities in the presence of children or youth.
2. When supervising or assisting private activities such as dressing, showering, or diapering infants or children, **Personnel will remain in an area observable** by other adults or work in pairs. **Children and youth must be supervised at all times to prevent incidents of Peer Abuse.**
3. Safe restrooms, locker rooms, and shower facilities will be provided by gender (or specific times will be assigned for the use of a single facility). **When children or youth express the need for additional privacy, every effort should be made to provide reasonable alternative arrangements that are appropriate for their safety and wellbeing.** A child or youth may request additional privacy for a number of reasons, including, for example, non-conforming gender identity, past experiences of abuse or bullying, or medical issues. Such arrangements may include the use of a private area or separate changing or showering schedule, or the use of a single stall restroom. To the extent possible, any alternative arrangement should be provided in a way that keeps confidential the reason for requesting additional privacy. Children and youth should not be required to use a restroom or locker room that conflicts with their gender identity.
4. **Diapering** must be done at diapering stations in proximity to other care providers and not behind closed doors or in isolated places.
5. **Age-Appropriate Restroom Supervision**
 - a. **Age Two through 5th Grade**
 - i. If the restroom is attached to the classroom or activity room and has only one toilet, the child may go alone.

- ii. If the restrooms are located away from the activity or classroom, follow the “rule of three”: two Personnel (at least one of whom must be an adult), or one adult Personnel and at least one other child or youth, should accompany the child to the restroom. Personnel must check the restroom to see if other adults are present before allowing the child to go in. If the restrooms are in a public space and the absence of other adults cannot be achieved, Personnel must be especially vigilant about the safety of the child.
- iii. In a restroom without a stall for the toilet, Personnel should stand outside the restroom door while the child uses the toilet. In a restroom with a stall, Personnel should remain outside the stall. If the child requires assistance in using the toilet in a restroom without a stall, then an adult Personnel may assist the child while leaving the outside door propped open. If the child requires assistance in using the toilet in a restroom with a stall, the stall door must be propped open while the adult Personnel is assisting the child. When possible, the outside door should be propped open as well.

b. Youth in 6th through 12th grades

- i. Youth may go alone to the restroom if the restroom is adjacent to the classroom or activity room or only a short distance away, but groups of adolescents must always be supervised in the restroom. Supervision includes adult Personnel who stand just outside the door of a restroom and verbally make their presence known or who make frequent and random checks of activity within the restroom.
 - ii. If restrooms are located some distance away from the activity or classroom, follow the “rule of three:” two Personnel (at least one of whom must be an adult) and one youth, or one adult Personnel and at least one other youth, should accompany the youth to the restroom.
- c. When there are **special needs or extenuating circumstances**, a specific policy may be formulated, approved by the Head of Organization and a parent or guardian of the child or youth, and implemented with appropriate monitoring and supervision. If assistance is needed in formulating such a policy, contact the [Safeguarding Minister](#).

K. Virtual Ministry, Social Media, and other Digital Communications

All digital communications must comply with Safeguarding policies. Ministry use of virtual platforms (such as Zoom) and social media is evolving, and protocols should be revisited as technology and platforms change. When questions arise about applying Safeguarding policies to a particular technology or platform, consult with the [Safeguarding Minister](#).

1. **Implement consistent privacy settings** that respect personal boundaries with all participants across all platforms.
 - a. Remember that privacy settings do not ensure confidentiality.
 - b. Each organization should develop and publish agreed upon privacy settings to be used by staff and volunteers and share that information with parents and students. members of the community.
 - c. For virtual meetings or classroom forums, utilize passwords and/or waiting rooms that require the facilitator to admit each participant.

2. **Be accountable.**
 - a. Ministry presence on social media platforms should have more than one adult administrator.
 - b. Inform parents of the ways that Personnel use social media and virtual platforms for meetings or instruction. Schedule all virtual meetings and classes in advance on a calendar that, together with log-in information and passwords, is shared with parents and the Supervisor.
 - c. Consider recording all meetings or classes held on virtual platforms. Before recording children or youth, obtain parental approval. (See *Section IV.A.2.*)
 - d. Whenever possible, communication with children or youth, including image sharing, should be with groups rather than in private messages.
 - e. Any digital communications that raise pastoral concerns or are of a potentially harmful nature (such as bullying, abuse, etc.) should be saved and disclosed to the Supervisor and Head of Organization and, as appropriate, to parents.
 - f. Any inappropriate material posted in online groups must be removed but should be saved by the administrator and reported to the Supervisor to be addressed.
 - g. Obtain parental approval before posting images or recordings of children or youth on social media or websites. (See *Section IV.A.2.*)
 - h. Review frequently the content and photos posted on social media platforms and websites.
 - i. Keep informed about new and emerging social media platforms that are being used by the children or youth in the program.

3. **When video chatting or meeting on virtual platforms involving video,**

- a. Personnel should be mindful of appropriate attire and surroundings that are visible to the viewer.
 - b. Personnel should not initiate an unscheduled video chat or video meeting on a virtual platform without prior parental consent.
 - c. Avoid video chatting or meeting online with a child or youth when another adult is not present who can observe the interaction casually. (See the [Adequate Adult Supervision Help Sheet](#) for guidelines for online tutoring.)
4. In group communication on social media and other digital platforms, **users shall create covenants** that address:
- Appropriate and inappropriate language and behavior (sexual, profane, or derogatory language and any sort of bullying are forbidden)
 - Who may join and/or view a group activity
 - Content that may be posted/published on the site or page
 - How images will be taken and shared (see *Section IV.A.* on prior parental approval)
 - Consequences for breaking the covenant, which may include removal from group
 - Mandatory rules for reporting misconduct

Consider disabling private chat features in virtual classrooms or meeting spaces when private conversations are not necessary.

5. **When posting photos or videos of children and youth online** or in any digital publication (after obtaining parental permission as required in Section IV.A.), do not provide personal or identifying information about the children or youth pictured unless the parents have expressly consented to providing such information with respect to the particular photo or recording.
6. **Social media, texts, and emails are rarely appropriate for a sensitive matter** that requires pastoral care and attention. In those instances, an in-person meeting or phone call is preferable as it allows for an assessment of tone and demeanor that helps to evaluate the situation and determine both urgency and appropriateness of a response.
7. **Use prudent judgment in the timing of your communications to maintain appropriate boundaries and avoid the appearance of impropriety.**
8. **Reporting:** Laws regarding mandated reporting of suspected abuse or neglect apply in the virtual world just as they do in the physical world. Report suspected abuse or neglect to the [Texas Department of Family and Protective Services](#): 800-252-5400. The rules of reporting found in *Section VIII* of these policies also apply.

L. Teaching Children and Youth to Keep Themselves Safe

The Episcopal Diocese of Texas can also help younger children and youth learn to protect themselves. The “I KNOW!” series is a curriculum designed to equip children and youth to keep themselves safe and can be accessed online at www.epicenter.org/i-know/.

IV. Prior Parental Approval and Registration, Waiver, and Release Forms

A. Prior Approval by Parent

Prior approval by a parent or guardian is required prior to:

1. A minor’s viewing any movie rated “PG-13” or above or participating in any program containing sexually explicit or violent content. Such approval must be in writing.
2. A minor’s being photographed or recorded on film, videotape, audiotape, or other electronic media. (See sample *Photo Release*)
3. A minor’s image or voice being posted online or in any form of social media. Such approval must be in writing. (See sample [Photo Release](#))
4. A minor’s participating in any off-site event. For each off-site event, a permission slip must be signed by a parent or guardian.
5. A minor’s participating in any sexually oriented educational program.

B. Registration, Waiver and Release Forms

A parent or guardian shall complete and sign a registration form and a waiver and release form before a minor may participate in any programs for children or youth. Confidentiality must be preserved with respect to medical and other sensitive information in the forms. Such forms can encompass a program year and must be maintained in a secure location on-site or electronically.

V. Off-Site Events, Travel, and Overnight Events

A. Prior Approval of Off-Site Events

Prior approval of any off-site event must be given by the head of organization and one of the following: (i) the governing body of the organization, (ii) the executive committee of the governing body, or (iii) in the case of a congregation, a Warden of the congregation. If the Head

of Organization is directly supervising the event, then prior approval must also be given by the [Safeguarding Minister](#).

B. Adult Supervision

1. Except as provided in 2 below, at any off-site event for children and youth, there shall be at least two unrelated adults with one being age 25 or older.
2. In the case of an off-site event involving travel (as defined in *I.C.*), at least three unrelated adults shall chaperone the trip, with one being age 25 or older, and the minimum ratios of adults to youth increase as follows:
 - **9-14 years – 1:5**
 - **15-18 years – 1:7**

C. Additional Rules for Travel

1. The **Responsible Person shall be at least 25 and be responsible for all aspects of the trip**, including carrying all necessary documentation, contacts, and forms (including medical releases, community covenant, emergency contacts, itineraries, and cash and/or credit card capacity to address emergencies).
2. It is **recommended** but not mandatory that one adult at least 25 years old hold a current **medical certification** to manage administration of necessary and permissible medications, first aid, and to triage medical situations to determine if an individual needs a higher level of care.
3. **A copy of all documents** shall be left with an accountable person at the facility of the organization and such person should serve as the local emergency contact person for communications between the traveling group and families at home.
4. **Insurance for Travel**
 - a. It is recommended that short-term trip or supplemental insurance, when available through the diocesan organization's policy as an added rider, be secured at least one month prior to travel.
 - b. It is recommended that all travelers carry evidence of personal health insurance in the form of a copy of the actual card provided to the insured person.
 - c. If any person does not have health insurance, it is recommended that consideration be given to adding health insurance to trip insurance.

5. **International Travel Considerations**

- a. Check in with the U.S. Department of State on travel requirements, including visas.
- b. Make certain that every traveler's passport is valid for at least six months beyond the scheduled return date.
- c. Arrange to have at least two cell phones with the group that will have active coverage in the destination(s). Make a back-up plan for communication with person who serves as the local emergency contact person in C.3. above.

D. Transporting Children and Youth

1. For off-site events that originate and/or terminate at the facility of the organization, all **drivers must be at least 21 years of age and provide proof of insurance, a current driver's license appropriate to the vehicle, and a completed volunteer driver information form.** It is recommended that the driver have a satisfactory DMV record check to be kept on file by the organization.
2. When transporting children or youth in vehicles, **two adults** must be in each vehicle, except when multiple vehicles travel in a caravan. **A roster of children assigned to drivers must include names and contact numbers for all adults and must be provided to all drivers.**
3. All drivers and riders must **comply with state and local laws**, including seat belt and cell phone usage.
4. **Parents/guardians are responsible for the transportation and safety of their children or youth to and from the facility of the organization or directly to off-site events that do not originate and terminate at the facility.** This responsibility includes the transportation of any other passengers in their vehicle.

E. Overnight Events

1. In overnight programming, particular consideration must be given to children and youth with disabilities, to LGBTQ+ children and youth, and to other children and youth who are at risk for being excluded or stigmatized. When special accommodations are requested, the preferences of these individuals merit careful consideration and action to prevent or minimize stigmatization of the participants and to provide safety, privacy, and the equal opportunity to participate.

2. When both boys and girls are participating in overnight activities, it is recommended that both male and female chaperones attend. Exceptions may be made after consultation with the [Safeguarding Minister](#).
 - a. Sleeping arrangements must be safe and supervised. No bed, cot, or sleeping bag shall have more than one person sleeping in it.
 - b. Supervision by two unrelated adults is required in any space where one or more youth or children are sleeping unless (i) the children or youth are participants in a program that meets the licensing requirements to which it is subject, or (ii) the Safeguarding Minister approves in writing an alternative arrangement.
 - c. It is acceptable for all participants to sleep in the same open area where dressing rooms and bathrooms provide appropriate privacy.
3. Except as provided in *Section II.C.*, participants must have access to three meals per full day, have the opportunity for at least 7 hours of sleep each day, and have some time set aside each day for rest or free time.
4. It is recommended that in the case of a hotel stay,
 - a. there be at least three children or youth per room and consideration be given to the relative age and size of the children or youth,
 - b. adult Personnel have rooms on the same floor, scattered among the rooms with children or youth, and at least one adult room is by the stairs or elevator, and
 - c. the Responsible Person assigns the rooms and room occupants.

VI. Code of Conduct

This Code of Conduct for Safeguarding God’s Children (SGC) has been adopted by the Episcopal Diocese of Texas to help create safe environments for children and youth and for those who minister to them. Persons who cannot agree to adhere to these policies are not allowed to serve in ministry to children and youth. Personnel are asked to carefully consider each statement in the Code and all SGC policies before signing the acknowledgement at the end of the Safeguarding God’s Children Training.

- I will not physically, sexually, or emotionally abuse or neglect a child or youth.
- I will do my best to prevent abuse and neglect among the children and youth involved in the activities and services of the congregations, schools, and organizations of the Episcopal Diocese of Texas.
- I will comply in spirit and in action with these *Policies for the Protection of Children and Youth*.

- I will immediately report my observations of inappropriate behaviors or boundary violations as outlined in these policies.
- I agree to report immediately known or suspected abuse to state and diocesan authorities.
- I will immediately seek advice from the Safeguarding Office if I have any questions or concerns about these policies or their expectations.

VII. Safeguarding Certification Requirements

A. Certifications

1. In order to be certified in *Safeguarding God's Children*, **Personnel must be screened and trained under these policies unless they qualify for an exception under Section VII.C.** No person will be allowed to volunteer regularly with children or youth until the person has completed screening, has a background check on file, and has attended training, *unless* the volunteer is a parent/guardian volunteering with his or her own child's program.
2. Certifications for lay Personnel are managed by the Safeguarding Records Administrator (SRA) of the organization in which they serve.
3. Clergy certifications are managed by the Safeguarding Office of the Diocese. Contact the Safeguarding Office at safeguarding@epicenter.org or 800.947.0580 to verify certification and for information on training opportunities.
4. The Safeguarding Record Systems (SRS) of the diocese will be used to obtain and retain all required documentation for screening and training. Except as provided in *Section VII.C.*, persons will be certified in Safeguarding only after the screening and training steps have been completed.
5. All Personnel who are employees or volunteers must:
 - Be known by the leadership of the diocese or organization for at least six months unless (a) a parent of a child in the organization, or (b) an employee whose completed background check (see below) is accepted before beginning employment. Any exception must be approved by the [Safeguarding Minister](#).
 - Complete a personal **interview**
 - Complete an **application and reference checks in SRS** for either volunteer or paid positions

- Consent to a nationwide sex offender and criminal history **background check in SRS** in any state where the applicant has resided in the past ten years.
 - **Complete Safeguarding God’s Children training** led by an authorized trainer in the Episcopal Diocese of Texas, and consent to the *Code of Conduct*.
6. All information gathered about an applicant must be carefully reviewed and evaluated to determine whether the person is appropriate to work with children or youth. **No person who is known to have a civil or criminal conviction or record of child abuse, or who has admitted to sexual abuse, may be employed or permitted to volunteer to work with or around children in the Diocese.** The [Safeguarding Minister](#) shall be consulted if there is any uncertainty. Guidelines for evaluating background check results may be found in the Safeguarding Records System Manual.

B. Deadlines, Recertification, and Transfers of Location

1. Safeguarding certification must be completed within 30 days of hire or start date prior to working with children or youth. When this is not possible because of extenuating circumstances, follow these [procedures](#) on documenting and supervision.
2. Lay Personnel who transfer within the Diocese of Texas should contact the Safeguarding Office to update their new location. Clergy who transfer from another Episcopal diocese must contact the [Safeguarding Office](#) to arrange for Safeguarding God’s Children training.
3. Adults who are becoming **certified in Safeguarding God’s Children for the first time, and persons new to the Episcopal Diocese of Texas, must take in-person training** by a diocesan-certified trainer (which may be satisfied by a live training on a virtual platform) and tracked by the Safeguarding Records System (SRS), unless the Safeguarding Minister agrees in writing to an alternative arrangement due to special considerations. The Safeguarding Minister may approve an online policy review in lieu of an in-person training when the lay or clergy person has recently received comparable Safeguarding training elsewhere.
4. Recertification must be **completed through the Safeguarding Records System (SRS) every five years.** This includes updating contact information, a new background check, and training. **If SRS recertification begins before or within six months of the expiration of current certification, then online video training is available as an option.**

C. Certification Exceptions

1. Parent Volunteers

Parent volunteers who assist no more than six times a year with a program in which their child is enrolled are exempt from certification requirements. Such assistance includes providing transportation but does not include supervising overnight activities or a supervisory role at Vacation Bible School. All adults accompanying children or youth on overnight events or supervising children at Vacation Bible School must be certified. Exempt parents do not count toward the Two Adults Rule and may not be alone with a single child or youth other than their own.

2. Youth Helpers

Youth who assist adults in the children and youth ministries of our congregations, schools, and diocesan organizations must always be under the supervision of two Safeguarding-certified adults and must follow the *Policies for the Protection of Children and Youth*. **In order to assist in children and youth ministries, youth must be screened and trained every 12 months as outlined below. Youth under the age of 18 may not be entered into SRS;** all screening and training records must be kept in hard copy by the congregation, school, or organization.

a. **Screening procedures:** All youth helpers must:

- Complete a personal interview
- Complete an application
- Undergo reference checks

b. **Training procedures:** Youth must be trained in the *Policies for the Protection of Children and Youth* using the [SGC Youth Training Guide](#) found on the safeguarding webpages or another training program approved in writing by the Safeguarding Minister.

3. Training Only Agreements

a. **Schools:** When a school's screening methods for employees meet or exceed the diocesan requirements, heads of schools may sign an annual Training Only Agreement with the Safeguarding Office that allows them to use the Training Only function in SRS for their employees. The school must provide to the diocese upon request a copy of an employee's personnel file (including all screening data) or, in the case of a parish day school, to the head of congregation upon request. Schools with a *Training Only Agreement* must still use the full SRS certification process for screening volunteers

unless the school is (i) not a parish day school, (ii) uses the same screening method for volunteers as for employees, and (iii) has a written annual agreement with the Safeguarding Office to use the “Training Only” function for their volunteers.

- b. **Vendors and Non-Episcopal Partners in Ministry:** When the diocese or an organization (i) uses a vendor to provide services with or around children, or (ii) partners with a vendor/business to run a ministry or program that involves children or youth, the vendor/business must comply with the Safeguarding policies and requirements of the Episcopal Diocese of Texas.

This Safeguarding *Training Only Agreement for Vendors* is available from the Safeguarding Office and must be submitted annually. The agreement states that the vendor/business has completed the following screening procedures for their volunteers and/or employees:

- Nationwide criminal and sex offender background check
- Application and reference checks

Adults from non-Episcopal vendor/business who are covered by a *Training Only Agreement* must complete Safeguarding God’s Children training, including a review of the *Policies for the Protection of Children and Youth*.

Examples of programs that may use outsourced organizations and staff:

- After school care
- Sports clinics
- Mentoring programs
- Mission trips, retreats or lock-ins
- School enrichment programs

- c. **Other Entities:** Other entities with screening procedures for employees and/or volunteers that meet or exceed diocesan requirements, may, at the discretion of the [Safeguarding Minister](#), negotiate and sign an annual *Training Only Agreement* with the Safeguarding Office.

4. Tutors and Independent Instructors

- a. **Tutors or independent instructors under contract with an organization:** If any organization contracts with tutors or independent instructors for their students/members, the tutoring must occur on the property of the organization, and all Safeguarding policies and certification requirements apply.

- b. **Parents contracting with independent tutors on site:** If a parent contracts with a tutor and requests that the tutor meet with the child at the site of the organization, the tutor must sign and date a letter to the parent acknowledging the following:
- The tutor is not functioning as staff of the organization.
 - The organization will choose an appropriate place (open, easily observed, etc.) for the tutoring to take place but will not exercise supervision or oversight of the tutor and student.
 - The tutor has not been screened or trained in Safeguarding God’s Children.
 - The tutor must establish a specific time for tutoring that fits the schedule of the organization and must not change the schedule without notifying the Head of Organization.
 - The parent must notify the Head of Organization of any changes in the tutoring times and when the tutoring has ended.
 - The original letter must be retained by the organization and a copy provided to all parties.

Parents contracting with independent tutors at home: If parents contract with a teacher or staff member of an organization to tutor the child in the child’s home, the parent must submit a written acknowledgement that the teacher or staff member is not or functioning as staff when tutoring in the child’s home and that the organization has no supervision or oversight and bears no responsibility for their actions.

VIII. Reporting

A. Suspected Abuse or Neglect of Children or Youth

1. Anyone who has reason to suspect that abuse or neglect of a child or youth has taken place is required to contact the police or the Texas Department of Family Protective Services (1-800-252-5400, or online at [Texas Abuse Hotline](#)). The TDFPS does not accept emailed reports. In case of an emergency, call 911. Failure to report suspected neglect or abuse is a crime. For guidance on making a report, see the Child Protective Services Guide in *Appendix i* or call the number above.
2. **In addition**, anyone who has reason to suspect that **abuse or neglect has taken place within a facility or in connection with a program of the diocese or an organization** should immediately inform:
 - In the case of the **diocese**, the [Safeguarding Minister](#) or Canon to the Ordinary;
 - In the case of an organization, the Responsible Person, Supervisor, a Warden (of a congregation), and the Head of Organization. In the case of a parish day school, both the Head of School and the Head of Congregation must be notified of suspected abuse or neglect that has taken place in the school. A report does not

need to be made to anyone who is the subject of the complaint. **If the Head of Organization is the subject of the complaint, then the report must be made directly to the Safeguarding Minister or Canon to the Ordinary;**

- Anytime that a **member of the clergy is suspected** of abuse, neglect, and/or exploitation, an Intake Officer under Title IV. (See *Section VIII.C.*)
3. The **head of an organization who has received a report under this section shall immediately inform the Safeguarding Minister or Canon to the Ordinary**, so that immediate and proper steps may be taken, including a determination of who should make the report to the Texas Department of Family Protective Services and providing for appropriate pastoral care for affected persons. (See *Section VIII.C.*)

B. Behaviors Inconsistent with Policies

Personnel must report any behaviors they observe that are inconsistent with these *Policies for the Protection of Children and Youth*, but which do not constitute knowledge or suspicion of abuse or neglect. Examples of such inconsistent behaviors include:

- seeking private time with children or youth
 - age-appropriate sexual exploration between youth or children
 - taking children or youth on overnight trips without other adults
 - swearing or making suggestive comments to children or youth
 - using staff or volunteers without Safeguarding God’s Children certification
1. **Personnel observing inappropriate behaviors shall make a report immediately by email, phone, or meeting as follows** (See [Confidential Notice of Concern](#) for guidance on the information to include):
 - To the Responsible Person, Program Supervisor, a Warden (of a congregation), or to the Head of Organization.
 - Unless the policy violation or inappropriate behavior is directly attributable to the Head of Organization, any Responsible Person, Clergy in Charge, or Warden who receives a report shall immediately report the same **to the Head of Organization**. In the case of a parish day school, both the Head of School and the Head of Congregation must be notified of a policy violation or inappropriate behavior in the school. If the inappropriate behaviors or policy violations continue, a report must also be made to the [Safeguarding Minister](#) or Canon to the Ordinary. (See *Section VII.C.*)
 2. The Head of Organization who receives a report of inappropriate behavior or a policy violation **shall immediately report the same to the Safeguarding Minister or Canon to the Ordinary.**

C. Diocesan Contacts/Intake Officers

The Rev. Canon Lisa S. Burns

Safeguarding Minister

510 Rathervue Pl.

Austin, TX 78705

report@epicenter.org or

lburns@epicenter.org

512.609.1876 or 800.947.0580

Secure Fax: 866.241.7050

The Rev. Canon Christine Faulstich

Canon to the Ordinary

1225 Texas Ave.

Houston, TX 77002

report@epicenter.org or

cfaulstich@epicenter.org

713.520.6444 or 800.318.4452

Secure Fax: 713.521.2218

D. Methods for Reporting

Reports may be made by telephone, email, fax, letter, or in person. For assistance with what information to include in the report, see [Confidential Notice of Concern](#).

E. Reporting Protection

No one who reports a violation of these policies will be retaliated against or adversely treated because he or she made a complaint.

F. Investigation and Enforcement

All reports of inappropriate behavior involving children or youth are taken seriously and will be investigated. The diocese may remove from ministry or place on administrative leave any individual who is the subject of a complaint during the pendency of an investigation. If the investigation substantiates that the complaint is valid, immediate corrective action designed to stop the misconduct and prevent its recurrence will be taken, up to and including dismissal of the offending person.

Appendix

Guidance in Reporting Neglect or Abuse of Children or Youth

- i. The Head of Organization, together with the [Safeguarding Minister](#) or Canon to the Ordinary, may help determine who best should make the report to the police or Department of Family and Protective Services.

- ii. To report known or suspected abuse, call the toll free, 24 hour, seven days a week hotline 1-800-252-5400 OR online at [Texas Abuse Hotline](#). DFPS does not accept e-mailed reports. (See [Texas Family Code](#)). To report an emergency, call 911. The report should be specific and objective and made as soon as possible but no later than 48 hours after the reporter knows or suspects abuse. A record should be made of all injuries or incidents observed, including the dates and times of day. This information should be included in the report, along with any available information on the relationship between the child and the suspected abuser (to the extent known).

- iii. Reports may be made anonymously. A report is confidential and is not subject to public release under the *Open Records Act*. The law provides immunity from liability for persons who report suspected abuse in good faith and without malice. Simply stated, “in good faith” means that the reporter believes what he or she is reporting to be true.

- iv. Anyone who has reason to suspect child abuse but is not positive should make a report. For guidance as to what is cause for reasonable suspicion, see the [Child Protective Services Guide](#) provided by [childwelfare.gov](#). If there are doubts about whether what has been observed constitutes abuse, a person should call the hotline for guidance.