

# Safer Sanctuary Policy Creation/Updating Information

Dakotas Conference of the United Methodist Church

Brenda Lint & Beata Ferris

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## Content

Moving from Fear to Flourish

Best Practices: Screening, Supervise, Report, Respond

Virtual Safety is included throughout the document

Building a Policy

Resources

## Introduction

1996 General Conference resolved to create a resource to support the work to reduce the risk for children, youth, and vulnerable people.

1998 all churches were to have a Safe Sanctuary policy

2023 time for an update and check-in

## Practice vs Policy

Accreditation at Camp...

- At Wesley Acres Camp they practiced many of the best practices for camper safety and care, but the practices were not written down anywhere. In order to bring WAC into compliance for American Camp Association Accreditation, **the practices needed to be recorded in writing as camp policy.**

Restaurant Substitutions Example

- Some restaurants print in their menus, “NO Substitutions”. However, when asked to substitute cottage cheese for fries, the server will allow it.
  - Practice is not following policy
  - In contrast, a patron may be told, “Sorry our policy is no substitutions” but this is not written anywhere for customers to see.
    - There is not policy. This is practice.

Consider your church and what practices are actually recorded in your policy.

- Does your church do what you say you will do in your policy? Do your practices reflect your policy?
- Are your practices recorded in your policy?
- Goal = have best practices for safety and care of children, youth, vulnerable adults in place AND have practices recorded in your policy. Safer Sanctuary Policy and actual church practices should be in alignment.**

## Moving from Fear to Flourish

From Surviving to Thriving ~ Making the shift

Why	Place of Fear	Shift the Culture	Protect	Change the language
Why does a church need a Safer Sanctuary Policy to connect to God?  Rediscover your Why – ask the right question	Give startling facts Fear lawsuits Save on Insurance	For too long and too many times churches relied on people being good people. 90% abuse perpetrated by a known person	The children and vulnerable adults from abuse  The staff and adult volunteers from unfounded accusations.	Make the shift from legal language to ministry opportunity

## **Why should our church engage in Safer Sanctuaries Policy Review and Training?**

**Baptismal Vow** ~ It is in the baptismal vows we pledge to newly baptized persons and their families:

“With God’s help we will **so order our lives** after the example of Christ that, surrounded by steadfast love, you may be established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal.”

- Ensuring best practices for safety and care of children, youth, & vulnerable adults while they are participating in the ministries of the church and having policies to support best practices is one way to “so order our lives” and the life of the church so that all are surrounded by love and can flourish.

## **“I am the Church”**

This is something we can only accomplish together. We as the church have promised to keep these beloved people safe. We need to work together to **create a culture** that the church understands and assists in the roles to keep everyone safe.

## **How much training and How often?**

Annual Training: Who

- Hierarchy of Training: pastors, leaders of ministries for children, youth, & vulnerable adults
- Ushers, Volunteers, Lay Leaders
- One-Off Events (youth rally; VBS)
- Staff

Annual Training: When/What

- Yep, that’s yearly!!!
- Reminder of main points, policy changes, and specialized training to include annually
  - Each year the best practices for supervision should be taught
  - Each year signs of abuse should be reviewed
  - Each year name the person who will receive incidents reports from volunteers.
  - Each year share any policy & practice changes since the last training
- Does not have to be same training every year.
  - Pick a topic of interest or need to focus on for that year’s training
    - How to handle disruptive children/youth
    - How to handle a situation with an outburst from a vulnerable in early stages of dementia
- Does not have to be Brenda/Beata/Dakotas Conference personal every time – or same presentation
  - Partner with local agencies to bring in a speaker on a topic of interest
  - Contact Brenda/Beata/Dakotas Conference personnel for a customized training to fit the season your church is in

## **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER/POLICY WORK TIME:**

Look at your current policy for the items listed below.

If present mark TO KEEP.

If not clearly present WRITE IN WHERE IT WOULD BEST FIT.

1. Purpose of Safer Sanctuary Policy
2. Definitions of:
  - Abuse
  - Children & youth
  - Volunteers and Volunteer staff
  - Vulnerable adults
3. Identify who (not by name, but by position) will serve as the church Safer Sanctuary lead representative
4. Annual schedule of training for volunteers and staff

# Best Practices: SCREENING First Step: Identify Needed Volunteers

Define your needs for volunteers: **Where? How Many?**

- Look at the number and ages of anticipated ministry participants
- Suggested adult to ministry participant ratios for camping ministry from American Camp Association:

<u>Ages</u>	<u>Staff to Child Ratio</u>	<u>Group Size</u>
0-12 months	1:4	8 kids max
1-3 years	1:6	12 kids max
3-5 years	1:10	20 kids max
6-12 years	1:12	24 kids max

Recruit the right volunteers: **Who?**

- Volunteers **must be active** in church for 6 months before volunteering with children/youth/vulnerable adults
  - They should be familiar to many people in the life of the church
  - New staff hires – hiring process will replace waiting period
- Supervisors 18+
  - Only adults over the age of 18 can be considered “supervisors”
  - Supervisors should be 18+ and 5 yrs older than those they are supervising
- High School Volunteers
  - High School volunteers are still participants in the ministry and will need supervision.
- Consider the style of ministry and tasks volunteers will be required to engage in
  - Bible study vs youth group games
  - Reading stories vs playing basketball/kickball
- Set up formal or informal Interview: **What?** (skills/gifts do they have to offer the ministry)
- Ask for References ~ people who will speak to the volunteer’s skills and abilities to serve in a particular ministry
- Can be an informal conversation; doesn’t need to be reference letter
  - Make a record of the conversation
  - Safely store documentation of written references and phone calls

## Screening: Background Checks:

Each church is responsible for running background checks on staff and volunteers involved in ministry with children/youth/vulnerable adults and can choose the company or institution to engage in this process.

Typically, background checks run by other organizations (like schools or other volunteer work) are not transferable to another organization, like your church.

*Camp Background Checks* is a resource used by Dakotas UM Camps for all camping & youth ministry related background checks. Contact DakCamps office (or see below @ end of document) for more information.

Who sees background check results?

- Only those designated as church Safer Sanctuary representative, and the pastor should see background check report results.
- The Camping office sees all results and passes along any names that do not come back “clear” to the church representative via email. All other names are understood to be clear.

Where are background check results stored?

- Each local church should securely keep records (digital or paper) of all background reports.
- Camping Office securely holds all results of all background check reports.

What level of check is needed?

- Full check, including driving and financial records
  - Suggested for paid staff, volunteer staff, anyone who handles any money matters
- Check, including vehicle
  - Suggested for anyone who will be transporting ministry participants (children, youth, vulnerable adults)
- Sex Offender Registry Check only
  - Suggested for any volunteer or staff who will be involved at any level of children's, youth, or vulnerable adult ministry

It is up to the church to determine who is checked at what level and how often.

What if a Background Check is Flagged?

- Use judgment to determine if information is applicable to the ministry where the person will be serving.
- Consider whether they self-disclosed any information to the church representative.
- Communicate about the information found in the check to the person involved.
- Share the safeguards in place to help them succeed.
- Share where they are allowed to participate and what level.
- Keep information confidential and securely stored in case of change in leadership.
- IF significant items are found make a plan to continue in the ministry program.

What if a Registered Sex Offender (RSO) is part of your church?

- Create a safety plan. Remember that you are to be the church to that person & that they have sacred worth.
- Create a Safety/Accountability team for that member:
  - Ideally 3 people including pastor on the accountability team.
  - An accountability partner for the RSO – someone that is informed every time RSO enters the church. It may be necessary to have a partner within proximity, depending on the situation.
  - Potentially have more than one person identified so that if the accountability partner is not available, there is no second person to contact
- Sign the safety plan and keep the information and safety plan private – only those who need to know

#### **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER/POLICY WORK TIME:**

Look at your current policy for the items listed below.

If present mark, TO KEEP; If not clearly present WRITE IN WHERE IT WOULD BEST FIT.

1. Definition of "supervisor" being 18+ and volunteers under 18 are considered "youth" and must be supervised
2. Screening practices (formal/informal interviews) and secure storage of interview conversations
3. Background check requirements & frequency and secure storage of reports
4. Definition of Safety/Accountability Team for when (not if) a register sex offender participates in the ministries of the church

# Best Practices: SUPERVISE: How to Supervise

## Supervising

Write a job description for each volunteer position (classroom leader, classroom helper, snack server, visitation team member, large group leader, check-in/out monitor...) See *Safer Sanctuaries* book (©2023 Sample Forms p. 239)

- Everyone knows what is expected of people serving in that role
- It can be short (half a page) and simply describe expected behaviors of any volunteer in that role
- Hard to fire a volunteer.... but sometimes it's necessary. A job description helps to have clear and kind conversations so that the volunteer can flourish and the ministry participants can thrive.

Consider the use of a volunteer covenant. See *Safer Sanctuaries* book (©2023 Sample Forms, p. 238)

Rule of 3 & 2 Unrelated Adults Rule ~ applies in ALL Ministry Contexts (in the building, during transportation, online communication, & while at off-site events)

- Volunteers or staff should not be in a one-on-one situation with a child/youth/vulnerable adult
- Always have at least 3 people present
  - 1 child/youth/vulnerable adult + 2 unrelated adults
  - 2 children/youth/vulnerable adults + 1 adult

Situations to consider how your ministry leaders will incorporate the Rule of 3:

- Transportation
- Public or open Place
- Bathrooms
- Gender/Sexuality

Recommended Ratios for Successful Supervision (repeated from above)

<b><u>Ages</u></b>	<b><u>Staff to Child Ratio</u></b>	<b><u>Group Size</u></b>
0-12 months	1:4	8 kids max
1-3 years	1:6	12 kids max
3-5 years	1:10	20 kids max
6-12 years	1:12	24 kids max

Supervisors should be 18+ and 5 yrs older than children

## Supervising: Registration Forms

Use of Registration forms to collect and securely keep information about ministry participants:

- First & Last Name, age/grade, allergies/medical issues of participant
- First & Last Name of legal guardian(s), contact information
- Emergency contact information (someone other than guardian)
- List of other adults who are allowed to pick up child/youth/vulnerable adult from ministry events
- Permission to publish photos, travel with ministry volunteers in vehicles

Have a short registration form for visitors/first time guests

- First & Last Name, age/grade, allergies/medical issues of participant
- First & Last Name of legal guardian(s) or person responsible for participant, contact information
- Permission to publish photos

Use check-in/check-out forms

- It is important to note when ministry participants arrive/attend and when they leave with their identified adult/caregiver
- Defines when the person was in the care of the ministry leaders/volunteers

## **Supervising Third Party Users of Ministry Spaces**

Do you have requirements for third party users of the church?

Do you suggest ratios?

Do you require anything in writing?

Your insurance agent may have recommendations for specifics.

## **Supervising Online Communication & Virtual Ministry Spaces**

Use Rule of 3 for online conversations as well as messaging

- Include 2 unrelated adults in any electronic communications (text, email, messenger apps) with a child/youth/vulnerable adult

Consider using group emails and services that archive all message exchanges

- ClassDojo
- Google Text Messaging

Have a social media policy for youth and church members

- See *Safer Sanctuaries* book (@2023 Sample Policies p.245)
- Dakotas UM Camps Social Media Policy (found on Dakotas Conference website)

## **Supervising Virtual Ministry Space: Online/Livestreamed Worship**

Some things to consider about online/livestreamed worship

- If a service is broadcast anywhere (livestreamed, shared online, local access TV) it should be declared so that those attending know that they may appear online
  - Print at top of the bulletin
  - On signage at entrance of worship space
  - Not just during the welcome at the beginning of the service
- Children's faces/bodies should not be in view
  - Consider how to still share a children's moment and yet protect the most vulnerable in the service
- Special Occasions should also be declared beforehand and guardian permission given:
  - Christmas Program
  - Confirmation
  - Older child baptisms
  - Youth Sunday
- Never create an online worship situation where a child/youth/vulnerable adult's name and face can be connected. Consider how to handle
  - Calling child/youth/vulnerable adult's by names into the microphone
  - Children/youth/vulnerable adult's speaking into the mic... you never know what they will say 😊
  - Printing names of child/youth/vulnerable adult's names in the bulletin

## **Other thoughts of Protection of Congregation Members:**

Picture directories-not so great

- Allow name & face to be connected to home address or phone number

Private information online (birthdays, anniversaries, names, addresses)

- Electronic newsletters sharing birthdates, anniversaries, and other information that is often used as personal identifier can be used to comprise identity
- AI technology can scan items posted on the internet for identifying information to build contact lists for SPAM emails and phone calls

## Church/Congregation Communications

Communication is the key to gaining congregational support and making Safer Sanctuary policy & practices a part of your church's culture. See *Safer Sanctuaries* book (©2023 Gaining Support; Create Culture p.173). and consider the suggestions below using a Safer Sanctuary reminder of the week/month shared via

- Bulletin
- Social Media Posts
- Newsletter
  - Highlight improvements in practice or building as an accomplishment.
- Email communications to volunteers
- Dedicate a Safer Sanctuary reminder regarding policy at the beginning of committee meetings

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER/POLICY WORK TIME:

Look at your current policy for the items listed below.

If present mark TO KEEP; If not clearly present WRITE IN WHERE IT WOULD BEST FIT.

1. Supervision expectations described
  - a. Rule of 3 (w/2 Unrelated adults)
  - b. Bathroom
  - c. Supervisors are adults (18+) and at least 5 years older than those they supervise
  - d. For Third Party Users of ministry spaces
  - e. Online Communications
  - f. Other contexts specific to your church's ministries
2. Registration procedures and secure storage of documents
3. Online/Livestreamed Worship Safety

# Best Practices: REPORT

Ideally, if the previous two sections (screening and supervision) are done well, there will be nothing to report. However, there may be situations that require reporting.

## Common Signs of Abuse

Annual training should always include the reviewing the signs of abuse so that all volunteers are reminded to notice the following signs and report to the appropriate person.

### Physical Abuse

- Unusual placement of bruises, frequent injuries, physically aggressive, tells you

### Emotional Verbal Abuse

- Low self-esteem, isolates self, appears depressed, yells/curses excessively, overly nervous in unusual situations

### Sexual Abuse

- Talk about sex, initiate physical touch, difficulty walking, potty training regression, bruises on private parts, tells you

### Signs of Neglect

- Poor hygiene, persistent hunger, overly self-reliant

## Reporting

It is not our job to dismiss or decide.

- As those entrusted to care for others, our role is to offer care, not judgement.

Hard to have child removed – no accidental removals.

- Unfortunately, it usually takes many reports to have a child/youth/vulnerable adult removed from their living situation. Don't hesitate to share the signs of abuse you observe.

If you see something concerning about a child/youth/vulnerable adult... SAY SOMETHING TO SOMEONE!!

## Reporting: 3 Types of Reports

1. Real-time ~ happened just now; was witnessed by ministry leader/volunteer; child/youth/vulnerable adult said something right away
2. Something happened at home ~ ministry leader/volunteer sees signs of abuse (described above) or child/youth/vulnerable adult says its happening
3. Historical tales of the past ~ abuse is not currently happening but has left lasting trauma

## Use an Incident Report Form

- See *Safer Sanctuaries* book (©2023 Sample Forms p.241 & 244) for examples
- All volunteers should know where to get a form...
  - They can be in classrooms or common space all volunteers have access to
- ...And where to return the form
  - To the Pastor or Safer Sanctuary church representative
  - Printed on the bottom of the form where to return it to

## Report just the facts

- NO "thinks or seems like"
- Be specific

## Train Leaders to Not Withhold Secrets

Learn your state's current laws! There may be a time period for making the report.

- None in ND or SD, but MN has a 24-hour law.

Great informative websites:

- Families Flourish North Dakota: North Dakota Chapter of Prevent Child Abuse America
  - [www.pcand.org](http://www.pcand.org)
- South Dakota Center for the Prevention of Child Maltreatment
  - [www.sdccpm.com](http://www.sdccpm.com)

### **Real-Time Reports: Contact Crisis Team**

The Safer Sanctuary policy should describe Crisis Team members (not by name, but by position). The names of people serving in this role should be known to Safer Sanctuary church representative. Suggestions for roles to be included in the Crisis Team:

- Child Psychologist
- Lawyer
- Communications Lead
  - Direct all communications related to the situation to this person
  - Should be a trained communicator who can handle pressure situations
  - Serves as the media contact and no other person talks to media.
    - “No Comment” is not helpful instead use “*Name of Person*” is the contact for the church on this matter.”
- Assistant to Office Staff
  - The church will likely receive many calls and inquiries. The office staff will need help to manage the increased work.
- Conference Superintendent

Annually invite people to serve in these roles by sending a letter/email outlining their responsibilities on the Crisis Team

- “Thank you for being on our crisis team. Your responsibility is.....”

### **Reporting: If the suspected perpetrator is a church volunteer or staff person:**

1. Believe the child/youth/vulnerable adult. Care for the child/youth/vulnerable adult.
2. Report to church authority, Pastor and/or Safer Sanctuary church representative.
3. Remove the volunteer or staff person from contact with all child/youth/vulnerable adults.
4. Contact parents/caregivers.
5. Call your local Department of Social Services.

### **Reporting: If the suspected perpetrator is a family member or friend of the child:**

1. Believe the child/youth/vulnerable adult. Care for the child/youth/vulnerable adult.
2. Report your suspicions to the Pastor and/or Safer Sanctuary church representative.
3. Call your local Department of Social Services.

### **One Call Department of Social Services Numbers:**

- ND: 1-833-958-3500
- SD: 1-877-244-0864

### **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER/POLICY WORK TIME:**

Look at your current policy for the items listed below.

If present mark TO KEEP; If not clearly present WRITE IN WHERE IT WOULD BEST FIT.

1. Signs of Abuse Reviewed with all ministry leaders/volunteers annually
2. Incident report procedures and practices described
3. Crisis Team Roles Outlined
4. Department of Social Services Number listed in the policy.

# Best Practices: RESPOND

We are called to care for all of God's beloved children. All means all. We are called to care for those who have been abused and those who have been accused of abuse.

## Responding

Act Quickly, Compassionately and as a Unified entity

No Cover Ups

- the age of "sweeping under the rug" is firmly in the past

Parents of Victim notified

- unless parents are accused
  - then follow advice of authorities

## Responding: Care of Accused

Finding Support/Offering Care

- Identify someone who has the ability/capacity to offer compassion and care
- Pray with & for the accused

Connect with Services

- Provide contact information to counseling or support groups

Know when to refer care of the accused to someone else

- Care for the accused can come from another pastor in the community or nearby community
- Deal with your feelings of betrayal so you can respond appropriately
- Seek professional mental help or others who can help to process emotions

## Responding: Care of the Victim

Finding Support/Offering Care

- Identify someone who has the ability/capacity to offer compassion and care
- Pray with & for the victim

Connect with Services

- Provide contact information to counseling or support groups

Know when to refer care of the victim to someone else

- Seek professional mental help or others who can help to process emotions

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER/POLICY WORK TIME:

Look at your current policy for the items listed below.

If present mark TO KEEP; If not clearly present WRITE IN WHERE IT WOULD BEST FIT.

1. Commitment to care for the victim AND the accused
2. Steps for care for both the victim and accused
3. Local Resources for support contact information

# BUILDING A POLICY

One Size Does NOT Fit All...

- City vs Rural?
- What ministries take place?
- What is the building like?
- How many staff/volunteers?
- How many ministry participants?

Your church's policy must be unique to the community, ministries, and people you are in ministry alongside. Each church should develop their own policy to address the uniqueness of the church and community.

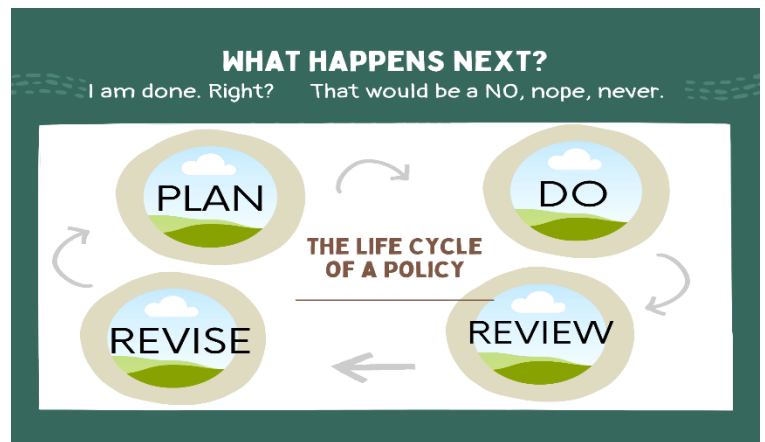
## Building a Policy First Steps for a Church

- Begin by reviewing *Safer Sanctuaries* book (©2023) Ch. 21: The Eight Steps for Creating a Policy (pg. 163)
- Research & learn about abuse in your community and resources available for support
- Determine your level of need including barriers you may face (financial, generational, language, cultural, perception)
- Evaluate your current practices
- Develop new (or update) policies that reflect your best practices
- Create a plan for recognition of need for a policy by the congregation and anticipate potential negative responses
- Churchwide adoption of policies, practices, and procedures
- Educate the entire congregation

Once the policy is written...**You are not done!** This policy does not go to live in a file on a dusty shelf or computer.

You are at one step of the Policy Life Cycle:

1. Plan ~ Write Policy
2. Do ~ Implement policy, best practices, & procedures
3. Review ~ **Annually** review policy for necessary updates as ministries, volunteers, or building changes
4. Revise ~ Edit the policy as necessary to fit ministry needs



# Building a Policy: Resources To Help You Get Started

...However, One size does fit A LOT

There are Sample Policies on the Dakotas Conference Website→ Safer Sanctuaries Resources Page:

- [Safer Sanctuaries – SAMPLE POLICY-Large Membership Congregation](#)
- [Safer Sanctuaries--SAMPLE POLICY-Small Membership Congregation](#)

Dakotas Conference Safer Sanctuary Trainers (Brenda Lint & Beata Ferris) have sample policies available as well.

## Resources in Safer Sanctuaries ©2023 book (beginning on pg. 229)

- Task Force-list of members
- Sample Employment Application
- Sample Volunteer Application
- Sample Authorization and Request for Criminal Records Check
- Form for Reference Check
- Sample Volunteer Covenant Statement
- Childcare Worker Position Description
- Report of Suspected Incident of Abuse
- Sample Accident Report Form
- Sample Policy for Social Networking...
- Appendix: Opportunities for Flourishing for People with Disabilities

## Other Resources in Safer Sanctuaries ©2023 book

- Policy info p.184-189
- Specifics p.85-154
- Off-Site Outings p. 184
- On-Site Overnights p.185
- Off-Site Overnight Events p.185
- Transportation p. 166
- Online p.187
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Party Users p. 187
- LBTQIA-Camp & Retreat p.149
- Nursery & Pre-School Children p.85
- Elementary-Age Children p.95
- Youth p.107
- People with Disabilities p.177
- College Ministries p.136
- Camping & Retreat Ministries p.143
- Building & Maintaining p.150

## Other Resources

- UMC Discipleship Ministries Safer Sanctuaries: <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/equipping-leaders/safe-sanctuaries>
- National Sex Offender Registry: <https://www.nsopw.gov/>
- ND Sex Offender Registry: <https://sexoffender.nd.gov/offender/search>
- SD Sex Offender Registry: <https://sor.sd.gov/>

## **CampBackground Checks**

Cost information Enhanced Nationwide Criminal & Sex Offender - Search Fee \$10.75

The background checks through Camp Background Checks company search nationwide criminal and sex offender records. For an additional charge, you can also add a Motor Vehicle Report (MVR) which searches DMV records. If any of your staff or volunteers will be driving children to events, it would be best to add an MVR. Those are run at the county level, and there is a charge per county. The county fees vary. Estimated additional fees are from \$7.75 to \$12.75.

*The primary item that is NOT included in the background check is a financial/credit check. If you have/are hiring a staff/volunteer that works specifically with money, you may want to use an alternative company to perform their background check.*

1. The church provides a list of the names of everyone having their background check run to Dakotas UM Camps office.
  1. Contact Stacey Edwards: [Stacey.Edwards@dkmnareaumc.org](mailto:Stacey.Edwards@dkmnareaumc.org)
2. Camping Office provides the church with the link to complete background checks.
3. The pastor or other church representative sends an email with the link to everyone who needs to run a background check.
4. Camping Office will monitor the reports as they come in and provide results to the designated church contact.
5. Camping Office will send a billing statement to church once charges are received from Camp Background Checks