

Leader Guidelines and Safety Standards for Children and Youth Events

Oklahoma Conference of the United Methodist Church
Adopted May 1994; Revised May 1995, 1997, 1999*, 2010, 2012

**Policies accepted by the Conference are in non-shaded areas.*

Procedures developed and implemented by the Annual Conference Council are in shaded areas.

A. INTERPRETATIONS

1. Adults directly supervising or leading children and/or youth are here referred to as “leaders” or “supervisors.”

- Persons in “direct supervision or leadership” are those who have direct contact and “responsibility, authority, and training to provide direct supervision” (ACA Guidelines) of children and/or youth at an event.
- Persons under the age of 18, or who (regardless of age) are identified or used as persons “in training,” cannot be “leaders/supervisors,” and cannot be included when determining leader/participant ratios.
- Staff employed at the campground or facility cannot be counted as leaders/supervisors unless they are fully involved in the ministry of the event.

2. “Event Leaders/Deans” provide overall administrative and ministerial supervision of the event.

- Event Leaders/Deans are responsible for insuring that the Leader Guidelines and Safety Standards for Children and Youth Events (this document, abbreviated throughout as “Guidelines”) are followed during the event.
- An Event Leader/Dean must be at least 25 years old.

3. “Camp,” “campground” or “event site” does not exclusively apply to a United Methodist facility. These guidelines, therefore, are in effect for any district- or Conference-level children or youth activity.

4. “Background Screening is used in three ways:

- a. The Background Screening Process

includes the following:

- Background Screening Form
- Statement of Disclosure: a criminal activity declaration made by the applicant.
- Leader Reference Form: evaluation forms sent to personal acquaintances and local church personnel.
- Signed copy of the Children & Youth Leader covenant

- b. The leader Background Screening Procedure

The Background Screening Procedure includes the following:

- Receiving and maintaining Background Screening Forms.
- Initiating and maintaining confidential criminal background check reports
- Receiving and maintaining confidential event performance evaluations.
- Receiving and maintaining solicited and unsolicited references, confidential and non-confidential evaluation reports, and other documents.
- The Background Check Administrative Assistant maintains all confidential, written records of the background screening process including the background check application form.

B. MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR APPROVAL AS A CHILDREN OR YOUTH EVENT LEADER OR SUPERVISOR

1. All persons directly supervising or leading children and youth must submit to the Conference Ministry Center a completed Background Check Packet no later than 4 weeks prior to the event.
 - Background Check files may be stored at and maintained by the Conference Ministry Center or a designated independent data management company.
 - This application shall be reviewed by designated ACC Directors and/or support staff and submitted to certain background checks.
 - References, background checks and evaluations shall be held confidential.
2. A person will be allowed to work at a given event only with:
 - a. a satisfactorily completed Background Check file,
 - b. a clear criminal background report,
 - c. signed "Children and Youth Leader Covenant" on file,
 - d. approval of the event's Dean/Leader (s).
3. All Event Directors and Deans shall be trained quadrennially by designated Conference level personnel. It is recommended that specialized age group curriculum training (i.e. District camp, Children's camp, etc.) be held in conjunction with the Deans Training.
4. All leaders/supervisors shall complete a training program prior to the event. This shall be provided by the Event Leader/Dean(s) of the event, through an event or on-line.
5. The possession or use of tobacco products in any form by leaders is prohibited at all children and youth activities. This prohibition applies to all hours that the event is in session for which the adult is counted as a leader or supervisor, and includes the leader's free time.
6. Leaders are prohibited from bringing to or using at an event any of the following:
 - fireworks,
 - firearms (loaded or unloaded; whether in the trunk of the car or any other so-called secure place),
 - knives (of any length) except when used under adult supervision as a part of a youth or children's event,
 - other weapons,
 - alcoholic beverages,
 - illicit drugs
7. Every person serving in an independent supervisory responsible role is to be 18 years of age or older **and** at least four years older than the oldest in the age group with which they are working.
8. Leader/supervisors shall provide a written evaluation of each dean following each event.
9. Evaluations will be submitted to the Director of Camps & Retreat Ministries. A summary of the evaluations will be shared with the dean no later than four months after the close of the event and will be placed in the dean's Background Check File.
10. Deans shall provide a written evaluation for each leader/supervisor.
 - Evaluations are to be maintained with the Background Check Files. They may be used in determining the "approved" or "not approved" status of any leader and are to be kept confidential.

4. Leaders will not put themselves in compromising positions. Married couples shall not be small group leaders of the same small group. Exceptions may be granted by the Director of Camps and Director of the appropriate age level for specific events and there must be a third, unrelated adult in the group.
5. Leaders will not participate in hazing.
6. The following hours for sleeping shall be programmed for any overnight event:
 - Children entering or in grades 1 to 5 (or 6) 9 hours per night
 - Youth entering or in grades 6 to 8 (or 9) 8 hours per night
 - Youth entering or in grades 9 to 12 7 hours per night
 - Adults 7 hours per night
7. Scheduled quiet times should be observed by all persons.
8. Leaders shall be provided opportunities for breaks from their direct supervisory roles.
 - For events 48 hours or less, leaders shall have one hour per day free
 - For longer events leaders shall have two hours per day free
 - Leaders shall not leave the camp ground or event site without the expressed permission of the Dean(s) of the event.
 - Leaders shall also notify the Dean(s) of his/her location in camp during free time, in the event of an emergency.
9. Requests for exceptions to these Guidelines shall be submitted in writing and in advance of the event to the Director of Camp and Retreat Ministries.

E. BACKGROUND SCREENING PROCEDURES

The Oklahoma Conference of the United Methodist Church is responsible to ensure that every district- and Conference-sponsored event is a healing environment for children and youth. Events should be:

- safe from potential physical harm,
- spiritually and developmentally appropriate,
- free from abuse between participants and/or by leader/supervisors.

Careful screening is one way to prevent abuse. Screening requires a careful review of information (through interviews, written information, personal contacts, reference and criminal background checks) in search of persons who can provide supervision in a safe environment and who can ensure adequate supervision.

1. All volunteer or paid workers with children and youth at the district- and Conference-levels shall:
 - a. complete in advance of the event a Background Screening Process,
 - b. submit to criminal background checks through any state, out-of-state, or national agencies as deemed necessary.

Criminal background reports will be secured from our authorized company, which includes a Name Based National Search of Criminal History, and a search of the Department of Corrections Sex Offender and Violent Offender records. Reports may be secured from the FBI as situations indicate.

2. Completed Safe Sanctuary Files (including background reports) are valid for two (2) years from date of application.

All background information must be resubmitted every two (2) years on the anniversary date of the initial application. Documentation from screening checks (e.g.: interviews, written information, personal contacts, references and criminal background checks, etc.) may be kept on file indefinitely.

- a. For leaders, the completed Background Screening Process shall be submitted no later than 6 weeks prior to the event.
 - b. For Deans, and other event supervisors, Background Screening Process shall be submitted no later than 2 months before the event.
 - c. In the event that, within 14 days prior to the start of an event, a leader/supervisor backs out for any reason, and in order to meet the proper ratio of adults to children/youth another leader/supervisor must be recruited, only persons already "Approved" may be used.
3. All Background Screening will be on line. All references (solicited and unsolicited), disclosure statements, and all criminal background checks shall be kept confidential.

Through the Background Screening process an applicant's file may be designated "Pending" during the time the information is being collected and the background application is being processed.

Once the Background Screening process is complete an applicant's file may be designated as either:

- a. "Approved" – indicating requirements have been met with satisfactory reports
 - b. "Not Approved" – indicating requirements have not been met.
 Laity who receives a "Not Approved" status may request a hearing with the Screening Review Committee composed of the Director of Connectional Ministries, Director of Camp and Retreat Ministries and the Safe Sanctuary Conference Coordinator.
 For clergy persons under the supervision of the Conference Board of Ministry and the Bishop, questionable information gained through the application process, references, evaluations, background checks, or other means will require turning the information and process of determining the "Not Approved," status over to the appropriate District Superintendent.
4. Completion of the Background Screening process and an approved background report do not guarantee an applicant a place of service at any event. Event Leader/ Deans have the authority to build their staff according to given guidelines (sections C and D above) with approved applicants as they see fit.
5. When involved in any Oklahoma district, conference, ecumenical, interfaith or multi-conference children or youth event, adult leaders drawn from outside the conference or from other faiths and denominations shall be screened under the same or equivalent procedure as set out in paragraph number 1 above.
6. It is the intent of these Guideline policies to meet or exceed state or federal laws related to screening and confidentiality issues.

When newly enacted laws create conflict with these policies, state and/or national laws will be complied with immediately and changes enacted as needed.

Approved by ACC Management Team April 17, 2012

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