

WISCONSIN CONFERENCE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
SAFE CONDUCT GUIDELINES - Where do we start? What to include?

In 2003, the Wisconsin Conference passed a resolution urging churches to develop and implement safe conduct guidelines. This is a "snapshot" for how to get started and what might be included.

Form a Team

- Include a variety of people: pastor, education director, teachers, treasurer, parents
- Communicate regularly with the congregation
- Ask the congregation to approve and bless the guideline once written
- Provide ongoing training and communication
- Periodically review and update the guideline
- Assess safety of environment, i.e. windows in doors, open doors, roving monitor

Guideline Basics

- Statement of purpose - why have you determined to establish guidelines
- Basic screening procedure for all employees/volunteers who work with children/youth
 - Personal information/disclosure form, background check, Code of Behavior covenant, response plan information
- Additional screening possibilities
 - Interview, references
- Maintenance of Records - confidential, long-term storage, limited access, regular updates
- Will you want to include?
 - 6 Month Rule - using volunteers who have been active members for 6 months
 - 2 Adult Rule - having 2 adults in each classroom
 - 5 Year Rule - aim for 5 years between the age of the children/youth and the leaders
 - Covenant Behavior - Adult leaders are representatives of the church modeling mature, adult Christian behavior in supervision, leadership and discipline. Boundaries are the responsibility of adults. A Code of Behavior signed by adults and youth.
 - Parental Consent - Document consent from parents/guardians for activities/programs away from church facilities.
 - Substitute list of screened people willing to step into a teaching/leadership position.
 - Transportation - valid driver's licenses, good driving records, adequate insurance, safe vehicle for leaders/chaperones. Written parental permission for children/youth.
 - Drugs, Alcohol, Tobacco and Ammunition are not permitted.
 - Inappropriate conduct should be promptly reported to a Response Team.

Designing a Response Plan

- Ordained, licensed or commissioned ministers are required to report sexual abuse by law.
- Inappropriate conduct should be reported to either a staff member or Response Team Member.
- All allegations will be taken seriously. Everyone's safety and confidentiality will be respected.
- Take immediate steps to insure the safety of the complainant.
- An accused employee should be temporarily relieved of his/her duties during investigation.
- Investigate and document the incident(s).
- If charges are valid, immediately comply with state laws.
- A report should be made to Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, the church's insurance provider, attorney and Association Minister.
- The church's attorney should be present while authorities (legal or civil) make investigative inquiries.

- Identify a spokesperson to make public statements to the congregation and/or the press.

Things to Consider

- Make your guideline workable. You can always do more; but you cannot do less than what you have said you will do.
- Don't include something you are unprepared or unwilling to carry out.
- There is no air tight guideline that will cover all the possibilities that might present themselves. A cumbersome guideline will challenge the best team to carry out effectively.
- An ongoing Team will be helpful to interpret and revise the guideline as needed.
- Your guidelines will need to be revisited and revised on a regular basis.
- Continue communicating with the congregation about the presence of safe church guidelines.
- Records need to be kept confidential and secure for a long period of time. Keep copies of your insurance policies.
- Most safe organizations are now using a screening process for employees and volunteers.
- This can be an evangelism tool. Parents seeking a church home may feel more welcomed because you have already thought about the safety of their children.

Further Considerations

- Sexual harassment is serious and offensive behavior. While more subtle, it can severely damage trust and relationships within the congregation. You may want to include a statement and response plan in your safe sanctuary guideline. Prevention is the best tool.
- Sex Offenders may want or need to be part of a faith community. Or having had to implement your safe sanctuary guideline, you may be faced with the question, "how can this person worship here?" You may want to explore this possibility and include a plan in your safe church guidelines.
- Information and resources on both these topics are available from the Wisconsin Conference UCC.