

**North Georgia Annual Conference
Policy for Reducing the Risk of Abuse for
Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults
In District and Conference Ministry Programs and Events**



God calls us to make our ministries safe, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from abuse and exploitation. God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults can be safe and grow strong.

We recognize that our children are all children and youth under the age of 18. Vulnerable adults are those 65 and older, and those over 18 years of age with cognitive and/or physical disabilities. Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to those in our care, as well as to those who are committed to engaging in ministry as volunteers and employees.

Jesus said, "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones...it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea." (Matthew 18:6 NRSV) We affirm our responsibility for the safety of children at each child's baptism by our congregational response, pledging:
"With God's help we will so order our lives after the example of Christ, that this child, surrounded by steadfast love, may be established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal."
(from the Book of Worship, Baptismal Covenant, Congregational Pledge 2)

The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church state that "...children must be protected from economic, physical, and sexual exploitation and abuse."

Building on our theological and spiritual foundation, we must act in ways that secure for children, youth and vulnerable adults a safe place in our ministries. It is also our responsibility to assure that those who make the commitment to work with our children, youth, and vulnerable adults as volunteers or paid staff, are protected from the possibility of false allegations.

Although it is our fervent hope and prayer that abuse does not occur in our District and Conference programs, we must put into place sufficient mechanisms to reduce the risk of abuse of children, youth, vulnerable adults, and those who work with them. For that purpose, our ministries shall implement the following procedures in District and Conference ministry programs and events.

RECRUITING/SCREENING WORKERS

All persons employed to serve in a supervisory capacity for children/youth shall:

- Be at least 21 years of age. In certain circumstances, such as Camp and Retreat Ministries leadership, 18 years shall be the acceptable minimum age when combined with adequate training in the Conference policies and procedures and competent oversight by a qualified adult.
- Complete an Application/Commitment Form.
- Provide three character references.
- Be interviewed by the Director of the ministry/program.
- Consent to a criminal records check and a driver's license record check. This process can sometimes take up to 2 weeks; therefore; care should be taken to recruit workers and collect

necessary information for submission to proper authorities with enough lead time to fully meet the policy requirements).

All volunteers serving in a supervisory capacity for children/youth shall:

- Be at least 21 years of age.
- Complete an Application/Commitment form.
- Be interviewed by the Director of the ministry/program.
- Consent to a criminal records check and driver's license records check.
- Provide three character references.

All volunteers serving in a helping capacity for children/youth shall:

- Complete an Application/Commitment form.
- Be interviewed by the Director of the ministry/program.
- Consent to a criminal records check and driver's license records check.
- Provide three character references.

In the event that a substitute worker needs to be brought in under last minute circumstances, that person must:

- Complete an Application/Commitment form.
- Provide a character reference who can be contacted by the Director immediately.
- Complete a basic orientation/training provided by the Director or other supervisor before actually beginning work.

TRAINING

Training must be a mandatory component of each Event's design. The Design Team shall be responsible for assuring that adequate insurance for the specific event and/or activities either from the Conference or the District is in place. The Design Team must also have a person available at the event who is designated to receive any report of allegations of abuse and follow through according to the Conference guidelines and the requirements of State Law. All workers shall be trained in safety, first aid, and abuse prevention.

Training shall include information, explanation, and discussion of:

- The Annual Conference Policy.
- Behaviors or other indicators which may signal problems.
- Requirements of Georgia law for reporting incidents of abuse.
- Procedures for response to incidents of abuse and for reporting incidents of abuse.

All workers and leaders will sign a covenant to abide by the Conference policy at the conclusion of each training prior to an event.

REGULAR OPERATIONS FOR PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

All District and Conference ministries with children/youth shall be governed by these guidelines:

- Two adults shall be present at all times.

- If both boys and girls are participants, then the adult leaders should also include both men and women.
- The number of workers required for each event (above the minimum of two) will be determined by the number and age of the participants and the nature of the activities.
- Unauthorized visitors will not be allowed to remain with the group.
- Participants will not be allowed to leave the designated meeting area without permission/supervision.
- During ministry events, one-on-one activities shall not be conducted “behind closed doors” or in isolated area away from trained supervisory persons.
- All ministry events will be carried out in appropriate locations with adequate equipment and trained adult supervisors present.

REPORTING INCIDENTS

All reporting of alleged incidents or actual incidents of abuse must strictly follow Georgia law.

A worker who has reasonable cause to suspect that abuse has occurred should secure the safety of the child, if possible, and then immediately report the incident to the Director/Supervisor of the ministry event. It is never the responsibility of a worker with children or youth to investigate allegations of child abuse. The Director/Supervisor will then follow all appropriate procedures for reporting to the child’s parents or guardian, authorities of the Annual Conference and/or District, and local law enforcement or child protective service agencies. In the event that the Director/Supervisor is the alleged perpetrator, reports should be given to the District Superintendent for the District holding the event, or in the case of a North Georgia Conference sponsored event, the Director of Connectional Ministries will receive the report.

CONCLUSION

We take our policies to reduce risk of abuse seriously and we are committed to their enforcement for the safety and security of all our children, youth, vulnerable adults, and those who work with them.

All Conference and District ministry events are required to comply with these policies. Each Conference ministry event shall be subject to review by the Executive Committee of the Conference Office of Connectional Ministries and the Conference staff person related to that event.

Each District ministry event shall be subject to review by the Executive Committee of the District Leadership Team or its equivalent.

Conference and District ministry events not sponsored by the Conference Office of Connectional Ministries or the District Leadership Team or its equivalent will be subject to review by the Team, Committee, or Board that initiates the event.

Non-compliance with these policies shall result in potential loss of sponsorship by the Conference Office of Connectional Ministries, District Leadership Team, or the sponsoring Team, Board, or Committee.

The Conference Office of Connectional Ministries shall review these policies and procedures annually.

These policies and procedures were unanimously adopted by the 1998 session of the North Georgia Annual Conference. Implementation of the training procedures began by the 1999 session of the Annual Conference and continue in Conference and District events. This policy was reviewed and updated for the 2017 session of Annual Conference.