



Messiah Evangelical Lutheran Church Child/Adult Protection Guidelines

Following are the guidelines of Messiah Evangelical Lutheran Church with regard to unacceptable behavior for the protection of children, youth and adults as they interact in the ministry and programs of the congregation. Whenever there are church sponsored functions it is helpful to have clearly stated expectations as to what is and isn't acceptable behavior. Please acquaint yourselves thoroughly with this information. Should you need clarification please be in touch with the professional staff of the church.

This policy is put forth for the protection of all Children and Adults at Messiah Lutheran Church in response to the following issues:

1. Misconduct
2. Confidentiality
3. When to Refer
4. General Safety

The following terms will be used in this document:

1. **Individual** will refer to people of all ages.
2. **Adult** will refer to any individual 19 years old and older.
3. **Youth** will refer to any individual 18 years old and younger.
4. **Professional staff** means Pastors and Director of Youth & Family Ministry.

Types of commonly seen abuse to be aware of include:

Child neglect: defined as omission of the child's basic needs, physical, environmental, emotional, and nutritional that are necessary for a child's well being.

Emotional abuse: this involves verbal or nonverbal violence toward a child that gives the child the message that the child is "not good" and never will be. The caretaker is under stress, has little impulse control and lashes out at the child.

Physical abuse: involves physical violence toward a child where the parent or caretaker is not in control, is under stress or has little control over impulses. Such mistreatment may be due to excessive corporal punishment. It could also occur in situations such as group initiations.

Sexual abuse or sexual molestation: involves any sexual act between a child and an adult or a young child and a significantly older child. Such acts may range from fondling to sexual intercourse.

Note: Children with handicaps often become targets for all kinds of abuse. Their handicapping conditions may increase parental frustrations, resulting in neglect, emotional abuse and physical abuse. Vulnerability to sexual abuse is increased due to physical or mental conditions perceived by the abuser to increase the child's helplessness.

Section 1: MISCONDUCT

Human sexuality can become the basis for oppression and injustice that violates intention of God. When the gift of human sexuality is misused, it is a sin against God, and contrary to the evangelical witness of the church. The protection of both the child and the adult within the context of Christian fellowship is imperative.

Sexual Misconduct: Any behavior that is in violation of one or more of the following:

A. Physical Contact

1. **Sexual touch is contact with the penis, vagina, buttocks, and breast-chest area.** This is not permitted at anytime.
2. **No kissing of any kind is permitted between two single adults, adults and youth, or youth and youth.** Married adults must use discretion with public display of affection.
3. **Hugging will be done in group settings.** Suggested appropriate are A-frame hugs, side hugs, and one arm hugs.
- 3.1 **Both adults and youth have the right to reject hugs if ever uncomfortable with them for any reason.** Respect this right to private space.
4. **If you suspect sexual experimentation is going on, between youth, or an adult and youth, consult the professional staff.** The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America and Messiah Lutheran Church support abstinence until marriage.

B. One on One Interaction

1. **Adults should not meet alone with a youth in a private place for any reason.** Another youth or adult should be present during private meetings or meetings must be held in a public place. If an individual requests to speak with you alone, choose a public location or an area where you are in view of other people.
2. **Adults should avoid being left alone with a youth. Adults should also avoid being alone in a car with a youth.**
- 2.1 **When being alone with a youth is unavoidable, precautions must be taken.** If you need to drive one youth home, call their parents to let them know that you are on the way. This avoids miscommunications and misunderstandings. All waiting must be in a lighted public assessable area.

3. **Overnight events with female and male youth in attendance require at least one female and one male adult be present.** There must be one adult for every eight youth. Male and female sleeping areas will be separate.

C. Discussion of Sexuality

1. **Discussion of sexuality should take place in a group setting.** No discussion of an adult's sexual experience is allowed.
2. **Explicit sexual language is not to be used by anyone and stopped immediately if it is heard.**
3. **Insinuating remarks concerning a person's sexuality, race or culture is not acceptable and must be confronted.** Put downs using sexual language or referring to sexual orientation are prohibited.

SECTION 2 - CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality encourages trust and builds community; however, there are boundaries within confidentiality that are critical.

A. Confidentiality: Any discussion that occurs between any two individuals will be kept from the knowledge of others unless both parties give their consent to do so. Confidentiality can only be broken in regard to unlawful behavior, which must be reported.

1. **Never promise or guarantee complete confidentiality to anyone.** For example, let youth know that sexual and physical abuse disclosure must be reported by law.
2. **If you perceive that an individual is going to disclose confidential information, inform them that you may not be able keep this information confidential.**
 - a. It is preferred that an adult of the same sex as the youth be present during such a disclosure.

B. Reporting dangerous behaviors

1. **Suicide threats and casual remarks about suicide should always be taken seriously.** Report immediately to pastoral staff.

2. **If you suspect a youth is suffering from an eating disorder, or any forms of physical, sexual or emotional abuse, say nothing to the youth.** Express your concern to pastoral staff. Comments to the youth could cause greater problems.
3. **Professional staff will inform parents of these concerns or behaviors.**
4. **Disclosure of substance abuse should be reported immediately.**
5. **All responsible suspicions of abuse will be reported to Children's Protective Services within 24 hours by professional staff.**
 - a. Do not try to personally investigate or verify that these behaviors have occurred.

SECTION 3 - SAFETY

1. **Youth Ministry groups will meet at church before events.** Parents will generally arrange for transportation to church. Youth who have a driver's license and parental permission may drive themselves to church.
2. **For travel from church to a local event, Youth Ministry will provide an adequate number of adult drivers (college age or older). We expect youth to ride in a vehicle driven by an adult to and from the event.**
3. **Unless otherwise arranged in advance, all youth and adult drivers will return to church before returning home.**
4. **For out-of-town trips or retreats only adults will be allowed to drive vehicles.**
5. **Notes on insurance:**
 - a. Insurance of the owner of the vehicle is prominent for damage to the vehicle.
 - b. The insurance of parents is prominent for personal injuries, then the owner of the vehicle, then the congregation.
 - c. The congregation has non-owned vehicle liability which protects the congregation up to \$1 million. This covers any person who is authorized by the congregation to drive.
 - d. Do not charge people for "transportation costs" as this changes the concept of liability.
6. **When driving youth, traffic laws will be obeyed at all times. Do not speed.**

7. **All passengers must wear safety belts properly at all times.** Driver is responsible for informing passengers to put on their safety belts.
8. **Youth cannot drive other youth.**
9. **Drivers must be High School graduates and be authorized drivers for the church sponsored activity.** Do not leave until every driver has directions and phone number of the destination.
10. **Youth will never be left alone at the church or elsewhere following a youth activity and will be supervised until picked up.** Refer to section 1 on how to properly deal with situations where an adult and youth could be alone.
11. **No youth activity will take place without adult presence.**
12. **General Permission Form (GPF) should be on file before youth can attend an activity.** Youth without GPF on file may attend an activity on the church campus with parent permission. Emergency phone number should be secured.
13. **Medication taken by youth while on a youth activity must be dispensed by an adult sponsor with parents' permission and written instructions.**
14. **Punishment, corporal or otherwise, will not be tolerated.**