

# TRAVELING WITH YOUTH

## ABUSE PREVENTION STRATEGIES

### Purpose

God has given us a sacred opportunity and great responsibility to nurture and protect children, youth, and vulnerable adults, and the persons who work with them. As Christians, we must take our responsibilities to our children, youth, and vulnerable adults seriously. It is possible for us to greatly reduce the risk of abuse by following a thorough, practical policy of prevention.

**Young People's Ministries** at the **General Board of Discipleship** works with agencies of the general United Methodist church and individual Annual Conferences in establishing **Safe Sanctuaries®** policies, guidelines, practices and training. This work most often applies to annual conference, district, or local church settings. This support from **Young People's Ministries** is a direct result of the UMC's 1996 General Conference adoption of a resolution to reduce the risk of abuse of children, youth, and vulnerable adults in the church (*1996 Book of Resolutions*, pgs 384-386).

This particular set of guidelines is specifically intended to address best practices that will be consistent with **Safe Sanctuaries®** guidelines and policies while traveling with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. These guidelines can be employed as a risk reduction strategy in a wide variety of ministry activities.

Ministry leaders can use the following suggestions as they plan travel with youth, or other vulnerable populations, as a part of their ministry.



### Pre-trip Preparation/ Documentation

- Each adult traveling with youth must go through their church's and/or annual conference's background check and abuse prevention training.
- Each adult considered to be a 'chaperone' should be at least five years older than the young people they are traveling with.
- A medical form should be completed by ALL participants (including chaperones) that provides: Name, Address, Emergency Names and Phone Numbers, Date of Birth, Health History including on-going treatment, current medications, any over the counter drugs they are prohibited to take, ALLERGIES, permission to treat and how to access out of area/country insurance benefits. Copies of these medical forms should be taken on the trip, and kept in a secure location under supervision of one chaperone.
- Each youth and their parent/guardian should be provided phone numbers that will enable them to contact the adult trip leader (or other adult chaperone) at any time, in case of problems en route or other emergencies.
- Trip Itineraries should be provided for all parents and guardians.
- Emergency contact numbers for the facility the youth/travel group will be staying and the hosting organization (Conference Office, etc.) should be provided for all parents and guardians.
- A behavior covenant should be provided and signed by all participants and their parents/guardians. This covenant should include: social networking guidelines or restrictions, acceptable behavior during "free time", dress code, language, drinking, drugs, smoking, weapons, respect for adults, and adherence to the event's schedule. Specific consequences should be outlined, as well as what party is responsible for transportation and related expenses if a participant is sent home.
- Any medication sent with the youth (child, vulnerable adult) should be in the original container with doctor's instructions. These medications should also be listed clearly on the medical form referenced earlier in this section.

## International Travel

- The US State Department recommends that trip leaders have a NOTORIZED letter of permission from the parents or legal guardians allowing an identified group leader to travel with their youth. The letter should include the adult leader's (primary chaperone's) name, the youth's name, the dates of travel and countries to be visited.
- Two copies of each trip participant's passport should be made; one to keep with the trip leader, separate from the original passport, and one kept on file with the trip participant's parent(s) or guardian(s).
- If contact information is provided to parents/guardians for a trip out of a home country, international charges should be addressed beforehand (i.e. Are calls/texting allowed? Parents and trip leaders should research how much phone calls or text messages cost on their wireless plans. Email or web based messaging is often free, but internet access at international locations may be limited.

## Travel

### Flying

- Trips and all participants should be booked on a direct flight whenever possible.
- Travel alone should be avoided when possible.
- Youth travelers should never fly alone on an international or cross-country flights. Adult chaperones should not travel alone with participants. If a youth is traveling alone, it is possible to register them as 'unaccompanied minors (for a fee) with the airline they are flying with. The airline then keeps track of them from 'gate to gate' during flight itineraries.
- If a group is gathering from multiple locations to fly to a single location (like Global Convo, General Conference, the YOUTH event, etc) that requires a connecting flight, a designated domestic hub airport should be determined as a meeting location.
  - All youth who travel to this hub airport should be met by two unrelated adults, with ample time planned for delays to gather, and transfer to a flight in order to travel together.
- Each participant should contact their parent or guardian at each leg of the flight when possible.

### All Travel

- Supervision ratios for teens should be one adult for every ten youth, and increases with younger ages per **Safe Sanctuaries®** guidelines.
- Each youth should be accompanied on their return trip to the airport, bus station, train station etc , by two unrelated adults if not traveling together until the youth boards or clears security.
  - The adults should remain in the terminal until the plane, bus or train has departed. At this point, chaperone responsibility ends. This should be clearly communicated to parents/guardians.

## Housing

- Participants should be provided their own beds whenever possible.
- Youth should always room with youth of the same age range and gender or be provided with individual rooms.
- Participants should only room with an adult (over the age of 18) if there are 'dormitory' sleeping styles and either another participant or two unrelated adults in the room.
- Dormitory rooms should house only one gender.
- Participants should never sleep alone in a room with an adult.
- Sleeping rooms should only be for the persons assigned to those rooms. They are not a gathering place for other youth.
- Youth may share a room with one adult if that adult is their parent/ guardian.
- There should be a process in place for nightly check-in and assurance that all youth are in their assigned room for the night.
  - Check-ins should be done in person, not by message passed through another participant or by phone or text.

## Recreation/"Free" Time

- Appropriate guidelines for the event area and age of the participants should be established in advance regarding 'where' and 'where not' participants may go during their breaks or free time.
- A system for letting chaperones know participant whereabouts should be in place (text or phone call).
- Youth should be in at least groups of three during free time.
- In-person check in times and a meeting place should be established before break/free time begins.

## Medications, First-Aid, and Incident Reporting

- A well stocked first-aid kit with OTC (over the counter) medication should be brought on trips.
- Over the counter medication should be used before its expiration date.
- First-aid treatment should be administered by a designated 'first aider', or other adult, who is certified and current on their certification for first aid, CPR, etc.
- Any treatment or dispensing of medicine should be logged with date/ name/medical complaint or condition//treatment - (this can be accomplished in a small composition book or on a simple spreadsheet).
- A general procedure to report accidents and/or incidents and lines of communication should be developed before the trip.