

## Form #8

# Guidelines for Youth Group Leaders, Interns, Youth Choir Leaders, Small Group Leaders, Confirmation Class volunteers, Bible Class Teachers, and Youth Chaperones for all Living Word United Methodist Church Youth trips

*Note: We live in an age where child abuse is a reality in our society. The church must deal with this issue as a "good shepherd" by taking steps to protect the children in our care. Living Word United Methodist Church has implemented a policy that will safeguard our children while promoting a positive, nurturing environment for ministry to them. The guidelines below are to be strictly followed by anyone working with youth in Living Word United Methodist Church. We pray for God's blessing for our children, youth, workers, and church.*

### **Before You Begin**

**Six-Month Rule** -- All workers must be members or regular attendees of Living Word United Methodist Church for at least six months before becoming youth workers (except compensated employees and interns who meet "frequent contact" screening standards). Exceptions may apply in the area of secondary Youth workers under supervision of staff or primary workers following successful screening as outlined in this policy.

**Completion of Application** -- All youth workers must complete and sign an application form.

**Release Authorization Form** -- All youth workers must complete and sign a Release Authorization form.

**References** -- Applicants will be asked to provide three references not in the applicant's immediate family. The church may also contact employers, former ministers, and persons who have supervised applicants in church work previously.

**Interview** -- youth workers must be interviewed by a church representative to determine their suitability for youth group work. Information from this interview will not be released to unauthorized persons.

**Background Check and Social Services Registry** -- After gaining the applicant's permission, church leaders will conduct a criminal background check and a registry check for applicants: this is mandatory for primary positions and optional for secondary positions.

**Auto Safety Form** -- All youth workers who will be driving children or conducting other church business must complete and sign an Auto Safety form.

**Signed Agreement to Follow Guidelines** -- All youth workers must sign the agreement at the end of these guidelines to show their commitment to observe these guidelines.

### **Guidelines**

**Team Leadership** -- Whenever feasible a youth will not be in the primary care of only one adult. Teams of adults (preferably male and female) will supervise activities. This policy has three purposes: it provides for more than one adult to help ensure appropriate levels of supervision, it protects adults from unfounded allegations, and it lessens the possibility of an adult becoming a "guru" who thrives on the dependency of youth as well as an adult having undue influence over an individual youth.

**Overnight Activities** -- At least two adults will supervise overnight activities per guidelines established. If the participants are male and female, then male and female chaperons must be present. If these conditions cannot be met, then the event should be postponed. It is never appropriate for an adult chaperon who is not a family member to share a bed with a youth. Males and females attending events must not share the same sleeping quarters and should have separate access to bathroom facilities. Experienced adult workers should be included with adults who are newcomers to youth ministry.

**Lodging Considerations** - - If overnight stays occur in individual homes which are outside of Living Word United Methodist Church membership, then a minimum of 2 adults must be present with the Living Word United Methodist Church Youth and must be able to observe them at all times. If overnight stays occur in hotels or motels, then Youth of the same sex may stay in rooms alone while Living Word United Methodist Church adult volunteers monitor the halls at all times. The specifics of hall monitoring will be determined by the Ministry leaders present based upon the physical layout of the lodging. However, the requirement is that all halls where Youth rooms are located be monitored at all times. If this requirement cannot be met, then the event should be postponed. No youth are to be permitted in the sleeping quarters of the opposite sex at any time.

**Individual Counseling** -- Team counseling is preferable whenever possible. When team counseling sessions are not feasible, notify another adult of the location and with whom you are meeting. Counseling should be done in a public place where private conversations are possible but occur in full view of others. Guard carefully to avoid seclusion. If possible, have female adults counsel female youths and males counsel males. A male/female team is generally appropriate for counseling either gender.

**Long-Term Counseling** -- Youth workers should not meet with youth more than three times to discuss the same issue. Youth workers are not prepared or supported for long-term counseling or formal therapy. Adult leaders are encouraged to refer youth who they suspect have a serious need for counseling to professionals in the community. Questions about referral must be discussed promptly with the Director of Youth Ministries or a Pastor.

**Informal Contact (Independent of Church Activities)** -- Informal contact refers to phone calls, letters, or face-to-face contact between an adult worker and a youth that is not connected to official church activities. The church recognizes that informal contact between worker and youth frequently occurs. For example, workers may hire teens as

baby sitters for their own children, or workers may see kids during social events with the child's family. This interaction is usually legitimate and beneficial. However, workers should seek permission of parents before having informal contact with their child. The worker should clearly let the parent know the nature of the contact and that it is not part of church activity. Parents are responsible for monitoring this informal contact.

**Transportation To and From Meetings** -- Transportation to and from meetings is not part of church or youth group activities. Parents are responsible for providing or arranging for this transportation. Parents are discouraged from asking leaders to transport children. However, if a leader does transport a child at the parent's request, this should be recognized as informal contact (not a part of church activities), and the guidelines for informal contact should be followed (see paragraph above).

**Transportation as a Part of Church Programs** -- The church may from time to time provide transportation as an official part of church activities. For example, the church may provide transportation to out-of-town events or field trips. When children are transported as a part of club activities, all guidelines will apply. Following the two-adult rule and having all drivers complete an auto safety certification form are especially important. A minimum of two youth and two adults must be present in every vehicle transporting youth.

**Confidentiality** -- **Youth workers must report to a clergy person if a minor discusses harming himself or others, committing a crime, or being abused.** There are limits to confidentiality when working with youth. Questions about such cases or other issues of confidentiality must be discussed promptly with the Director of Youth Ministries or a Pastor. Any serious issues discussed in confidence should be reviewed with one of the ministers, who will also protect the confidential nature of the discussion. Conferring with a minister on sensitive issues is not considered breaking a confidence.

**Youth Supervising Youth** -- Minors may help adults lead youth activities only under the direct leadership of adults. A minor may not be used to meet the team leadership or team counseling guidelines discussed above.

**Gifts** -- Youth workers are generally discouraged from giving personal gifts or money to youth. When the giving of personal gifts is desired, the youth worker must first notify parents and the youth minister. Gifts can be easily misinterpreted. Gifts given to groups of young people are appropriate, such as graduation presents or awards for participation.

**Corporal Punishment** -- Corporal punishment (hitting or spanking) and other forms of punishment involving physical pain are not appropriate in Living Word United Methodist Church activities. This rule holds true even if parents have suggested, or given permission for, corporal punishment. Youth workers must consult their supervisors or a minister if they need help with misbehaving youth or discipline techniques.

**High Adventure Activities** -- Special precautions must be taken on high adventure activities, such as rock climbing, hiking, overnight camps, raft trips, or the like. Both physical safety and safety from abuse are at risk in high adventure situations. A high ratio of

adults to youth is recommended. Guides for high adventure activities should be licensed by the sports governing body or government authorities to guide groups whenever possible.

*High adventure camping often raises unique circumstances involving individual privacy, sleeping arrangements, bathroom facilities, and so on. Adult leaders must be vigilant to avoid suspicious or misinterpreted behavior in these circumstances.*

**Open Door Policy** -- All youth events should be open door. This means that workers, parents, and church members have a right to observe any youth activity.

**Dating or Sexual Involvement** -- No adult youth worker is to date a youth or be romantically or sexually involved with a youth. Any adult with prior incidents of sexual misconduct may not be a youth worker or serve in any capacity of youth ministry at Living Word United Methodist Church . There are no exceptions to this guideline.

**Workers must report suspected or observed misconduct** by other workers to the Director of Youth Ministries or a Pastor immediately.

**Supervision and Communication** -- Youth workers must meet on a regular basis with the Director of Youth Ministries, and the Director of Youth Ministries must meet with a Pastor periodically to discuss any issues regarding these guidelines. Appropriate topics that must be discussed include problems, accountability, policy clarification, personal feelings, or other issues that may interfere with youth ministry efforts

**Workers must avoid even the appearance of misconduct.** This is necessary in order to maintain parental confidence and avoid mistaken allegations.

**Workers who disobey these guidelines may be reassigned or relieved** from youth program duty at the discretion of the Director of Youth Ministries or a Pastor.

**I have read the guidelines above. I agree to observe them faithfully:**

Signature\_\_\_\_\_Date\_\_\_\_\_