



STANDARDS FOR YOUTH ACTIVITIES

(August 2025)

Table of Contents

<i>Document Oversight and Review</i>	Page 1
<i>Purpose</i>	Page 1
<i>Terms and Definitions</i>	Page 2
<i>Selection of Trained Volunteers</i>	Page 2
<i>Supervision Guidelines</i>	Page 3
Two-Adult Policy	
Event Ratios	
Youth Guests Policy	
Visitor Policy	
Travel with Youth	
<i>Behavioral Expectations and Reporting</i>	Page 4
Youth Behavioral Expectations	
Volunteer Behavioral Expectations	
Reporting of Adult Behavior Concerns	
Reporting Abuse of Minors	
<i>Appendices</i>	Page 5
Appendix 1 - Child Abuse/Mandatory Reporting	
Appendix 2 - Best Practices	
Appendix 3 - Waivers and Permission Slips	
Appendix 4 - Church-sponsored versus Church-supported events	

Document Oversight and Review

The Council Representative for Education and Youth is responsible to ensure this policy is implemented in all activities involving youth at MLC. This document is overseen by the Council Representative for Education and Youth and has been approved by the Messiah Lutheran Church Council. Any modifications will be reviewed and approved by the MLC Council, with a revision history maintained to document all changes. A copy of this document and any related artifacts will be captured in the MLC Council Shared Drive.

To ensure ongoing relevance and effectiveness, this document will undergo an annual review under the direction of the Council Representative for Education and Youth. The most recent revision shall be distributed to all MLC Staff, Council Members, and Trained Volunteers within 30 days of its approval.

Revision History

Revision Date	Approval Date	Change Description
August 14, 2025	August 14, 2025	Initial release

Purpose

At Messiah Lutheran Church (MLC), we are committed to nurturing the faith formation and spiritual growth of our youth. Through Christ-centered activities and meaningful fellowship with peers and mentors, we strive to create an environment where young people can deepen their relationship with God and one another.

Recognizing the immense value of these opportunities, we also acknowledge the inherent responsibility to protect the youth in our care. Any setting involving children carries the risk of abuse—whether physical, emotional, or sexual—by both adults and peers. As stewards of their well-being, MLC is dedicated to fostering a safe, supportive, and Christ-honoring environment where youth can thrive.

To uphold this commitment, MLC implements a comprehensive approach to child protection, background screening, including training, and adherence to a two adult policy. By prioritizing safety, we ensure that every youth entrusted to our ministry can grow in faith with confidence and security.

This document helps MLC create an environment in which all activities involving youth are conducted with the highest Christian and moral standards. The standards set forth in this document will ensure the safety, security and confidence of youth, and the adults that lead them.

Terms and Definitions:

These terms and definitions are for youth focused activities

- **Youth** - any person under age 19 and any person still enrolled in high school (even if that person is age 19 or older at the time of the event)
- **Adult** - any person who is not a youth
- **Youth Focused Event** - Any event in which the primary/target participants are youth.
- **Trained Volunteers** - May directly supervise youth. They must be screened and trained in frequency specified in MLC constitution, and must be at least 25 years of age. MLC screening and training is required. Other screening and training can not be transferred in without approval of the senior pastor.
- **Limited Volunteers** - An adult volunteer who has not undergone the MLC screening and/or training requirements. Limited Volunteers may not directly supervise youth; a trained volunteer is required to be present at all times.
- **Event Coordinator** - Trained volunteer/Staff who is coordinating the youth focused event
- **Youth Volunteers** - Supervision of Youth Volunteers is provided by Trained Volunteers and/or Staff. Youth Volunteers must meet the following requirements:
 - 12 years old or older
 - At least 5 years older than the oldest youth participant
- **Staff** - Clergy or laypersons that have paid positions at Messiah Lutheran Church
- **Child Abuse** - as defined by the Department of Human Resources, see Appendix 1
- **MLC Screening and Training** - as defined below in *Selection of Volunteers*
- **MLC Sponsored Event** - An event hosted and coordinated by MLC. See Appendix 4 for additional details.

Selection of Trained Volunteers:

In order to become a trained volunteer that works with children or youth, a Youth and Education Volunteer Agreement form, MLC Screening, and MLC Training must be completed. Trained Volunteers and Event Coordinators should be members or associate members for at least 6 months. Members and Associate Members are defined in the MLC Constitution. (Exceptions can be made for newly hired Staff with MLC Council approval.)

The MLC Council Representative for Education and Youth is responsible for ensuring that these steps are completed.

1. Complete the Youth and Education Volunteer Agreement Form, which can be accessed on the MLC App or website.
2. MLC Screening: Complete an annual background check initiated by MLC staff or the council representative and reviewed by the senior pastor. (currently through Trusted Employees)
3. MLC Training: Complete an annual online course on Child Safety and Sex Abuse Awareness and submit the certificate of completion. (currently through Full Armor Church Academy)

Supervision Guidelines:

Two- Adult Policy:

Two unrelated Adults, at least one of which is a trained volunteer or screened staff member, will be at any youth focused event. It is the responsibility of the Event Coordinator to ensure the Two-Adult Policy is enforced.

When activities are taking place in multiple rooms in close proximity, the Two-Adult policy is met by having multiple trained adults in the vicinity and having open doors and/or doors with windows in the event a door must be closed. For youth in first grade and younger, the Two-Adult policy shall be adhered to at all times.

The Two-Adult policy shall be followed in all forms of communication initiated by volunteers (digital messaging, emails, phone calls, and any other forms of digital communications). This can be adhered to by including parents or other adults and/or using Group messaging.

Event Ratios:

During any youth focused event, the following ratios of trained volunteers to children must be met.

While the Two-Adult Policy shall always be implemented, the ratios listed below will act as minimum guidelines for an appropriate number of children per Trained Volunteer.

Age	Trained Volunteer to Child Ratio
6 weeks to 4 years old	1 to 5
10 years old to 19 years old	2 to 18

Youth Guests Policy:

In the event that a youth brings a guest to any Youth Focused Event, the parent/guardian of the youth they came with serves as the responsible party and point of contact for that child.

Visitor Policy:

For any visitor who attends a Youth Focused Event and is not associated with a Member or Associate Member, the parent/guardian contact information and any information about allergies or special needs will be collected before the Event begins.

Travel with Youth:

Messiah Lutheran Church will occasionally plan events that require youth to be transported to an alternate location. It is expected that youth ride in vehicles with two adults, one of which must be a trained volunteer.

- **Transportation with Youth Exception:** At times, it is not feasible for youth to ride in a vehicle adhering to the Two-Adult Policy. Travel with one Trained Volunteer is allowed for Middle School and High School Youth with digital or written permission from a parent/guardian.
- **MLC Sponsored Event - Overnight Stay:**
 - A separate permission slip will be signed by the parent/guardian for any overnight stay away from MLC Property.
 - Only allowed for Middle School and High School Youth
 - Sleeping arrangements are separated by gender or family unit.
 - At least two trained volunteers must be present for the duration of the event, and if the event includes both male and female youth, at least one male and one female volunteer must be present.
 - Trained volunteers will not sleep in the same space as youth unless they are all in the same family unit.

Behavioral Expectations and Reporting:**Youth Behavioral Expectations:**

Annual acknowledgements of behavioral expectation are the responsibility of the Council Representative for Education and Youth.

- All Youth, Middle School aged and older, will be asked to sign an annual behavior agreement, typically each fall. Parents/Guardians will also sign to acknowledge the youth's agreement.
- The behavior agreement will include consequences for violation of the agreement.

Volunteer Behavioral Expectations:

All volunteers will follow the highest standards of behavior toward all others. They should set a Christian example, and treat all children with the highest love and respect.

- Volunteers will set a good example in relationships with other adults and youth and show courtesy and decorum in those relationships.
- Use of tobacco, alcohol or drugs is not appropriate during youth focused events.
- Offensive language is not permitted.
- Volunteers may be asked to sign additional expectation agreements specific to particular events.

Reporting of Adult Behavior Concerns:

- If a violation of the Youth Standards by a volunteer is observed, the violation shall be reported to the pastor and/or Council President.
- Violations should be reported as soon as possible but no later than twenty four hours after the incident.
- Volunteers in violation may be suspended at any time and not allowed to continue as volunteers until further training and/or discussions have been completed. Other disciplinary actions may apply.

Reporting Abuse of Minors:

Alabama state law requires that certain professionals, such as clergy, report suspected child abuse (for children under 18 years of age) to either law enforcement or the Department of Human Resources. Additionally, *anyone* may report suspected child abuse to either of the two above agencies.

It is not required that Messiah Lutheran Church leadership be notified before reporting suspected child abuse, but it is recommended that the Pastor and/or the Council President be notified as a courtesy. Please see Appendix 1 for more information.

Appendices:

- **Appendix 1 - Child Abuse/Mandatory Reporting**
- **Appendix 2 - Best Practices**
- **Appendix 3 - Waivers and Permission Slips**
- **Appendix 4 - Church-sponsored versus Church-supported events**

Appendix 1 - Child Abuse/Mandatory Reporting

Section 26-14-3 Mandatory reporting.

(a) All hospitals, clinics, sanitariums, doctors, physicians, surgeons, medical examiners, coroners, dentists, osteopaths, optometrists, chiropractors, podiatrists, physical therapists, nurses, public and private K-12 employees, school teachers and officials, peace officers, law enforcement officials, pharmacists, social workers, day care workers or employees, mental health professionals, employees of public and private institutions of postsecondary and higher education, members of the clergy as defined in Rule 505 of the Alabama Rules of Evidence, or any other person called upon to render aid or medical assistance to any child, when the child is known or suspected to be a victim of child abuse or neglect, shall be required to report orally, either by telephone or direct communication immediately, and shall be followed by a written report, to a duly constituted authority.

(b)(1) When an initial report is made to a law enforcement official, the official subsequently shall inform the Department of Human Resources of the report so that the department can carry out its responsibility to provide protective services when deemed appropriate to the respective child or children.

(2) As soon as is practicable after a report of known or suspected child abuse or neglect is made, the Department of Human Resources shall make efforts to determine the military status of the parent or guardian of the child who is the subject of the child abuse or neglect allegation.

(3) If the Department of Human Resources determines that a parent or guardian under subdivision (2) is in the military, the department shall notify a United States Department of Defense

family advocacy program at the military installation of the parent or guardian that there is an allegation of child abuse or neglect that is being investigated that involves a child of the military parent or guardian.

(c) When the Department of Human Resources receives initial reports of suspected abuse or neglect, as defined in Section 26-14-1, including suspected abuse or neglect involving discipline or corporal punishment committed in a public or private school or suspected abuse or neglect in a state-operated child residential facility, the Department of Human Resources shall transmit a copy of school reports to the law enforcement agency and residential facility reports to the law enforcement agency and the operating state agency which shall conduct the investigation. When the investigation is completed, a written report of the completed investigation shall contain the information required by the state Department of Human Resources which shall be submitted by the law enforcement agency or the state agency to the county department of human resources for entry into the state's central registry.

(d) Nothing in this chapter shall preclude interagency agreements between departments of human resources, law enforcement, and any other state agencies on procedures for investigating reports of suspected child abuse and neglect to provide for departments of human resources to assist law enforcement and other state agencies in these investigations.

(e) Any provision of this section to the contrary notwithstanding, if any agency or authority investigates any report pursuant to this section and the report does not result in a conviction, the agency or

authority shall expunge any record of the information or report and any data developed from the record.

(f) Subsection (a) to the contrary notwithstanding, a member of the clergy shall not be required to report information gained solely in a confidential communication privileged pursuant to Rule 505 of the Alabama Rules of Evidence which communication shall continue to be privileged as provided by law.

(g) Commencing on August 1, 2013, a public or private employer who discharges, suspends, disciplines, or penalizes an employee solely for reporting suspected child abuse or neglect pursuant to this section shall be guilty of a Class C misdemeanor.

(Acts 1965, No. 563, p. 1049, §1; Acts 1967, No. 725, p. 1560; Acts 1975, No. 1124, p. 2213, §1; Acts 1993, 1st Ex. Sess., No. 93-890, p. 162, §3; Act 2003-272, p. 645, §1; Act 2013-201, p. 416, §1; Act 2016-354, §2; Act 2017-257, §1.)

Section 26-14-4 Permissive reporting.

In addition to those persons, firms, corporations, and officials required by Section 26-14-3 to report child abuse and neglect, any person may make such a report if such person has reasonable cause to suspect that a child is being abused or neglected.

(Acts 1975, No. 1124, p. 2213, §1.)

Source: <https://law.justia.com/codes/alabama/title-26/chapter-14/section-26-14-3/>

Appendix 2 - Best Practices

When working with children and youth there are some best practices that we suggest be followed by volunteers, including:

- Have sign-in and sign-out sheets (paper or electronic) and be sure to check for allergies, especially for visitors
- Adults should not initiate or accept a social media connection to a youth

Appendix 3 - Youth paperwork will be created and maintained by the Committee for Education and Youth and stored in the MLC Council Shared Drive or the MLC Website if electronic. Forms include but are not limited to the following.

- **Annual registration form**
- **Expectations and Behavior Covenant** - Youth and their parents will be asked to sign each year, and it will include expectations and consequences for violation of the agreement.
- **Transportation Waiver** to allow one adult driver
- **Permission slip for overnight stays**

Appendix 4 - What is the difference between an MLC-sponsored event and MLC-supported event?

An **MLC-sponsored event** is an activity that:

- Is planned, organized, and executed by MLC (staff or volunteers).
- Uses the MLC name and branding in official promotion.
- Is funded or budgeted through MLC resources (directly or via designated donations).
- Is covered under MLC insurance and liability.
- Aligns directly with the MLC mission, values, and goals.
- MLC is ultimately responsible for the outcomes, safety, and messaging.

An **MLC-supported event** is an activity that:

- Is **organized by another group or individual**, not MLC.
- May receive **volunteers, financial contributions, promotion, or facility use** from MLC.
- Does **not carry MLC's name as the main organizer or host**.
- Is **not funded or insured directly** by MLC (unless otherwise arranged).
- MLC's role is **limited to encouragement, collaboration, or assistance**.