

## Student Ministry Policy Manual

At First Denton we take our responsibility to care for students very seriously. These guidelines are intended to facilitate a safe and nurturing environment in which students can grow in relationship with Jesus Christ.

The pages of this policy handbook provide a general overview of procedures and guidelines for volunteers and staff members. Our policies are intended to create a safe environment for children, protecting children, you, and the mission of First Denton. The following policies/procedures/guidelines have been adopted and will be diligently enforced.

After you have carefully read this policy manual, please sign and return the agreement form located on the last page. Thank you for partnering with us in this critical aspect of ministry.

Sincerely,

***First Denton Leadership***

# Safety Policies & Procedures for Student Ministry

(Middle and High School Students)

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## Overview of First Denton Safety System

Because we care for students and desire to protect them, First Denton requires all staff members and volunteers working with children or students to complete **FOUR SAFETY STEPS** before ministry work or volunteer placement begins.

### Step 1: Screening Process

Staff members and volunteers working or serving with children are required to complete First Denton's Screening Process, which includes:

- an Employment Application (employees only)
- a Safety Application (employees and volunteers)
- a face-to-face interview (employees and volunteers)
- references to be checked (employees and volunteers)

***\*A volunteer must attend First Denton for six months before being eligible to serve in positions providing ministry services to children. Exceptions may be granted by the Safety Team for new members transferring by letter or individuals who are active members of other local churches. These exceptions will be considered on a case by case basis and will require that in their references they have at least one called minister from their home church. This reference should have personal knowledge of the individual's work with children in a church setting for a period longer than six months.***

### Step 2: Sexual Abuse Awareness Training

First Denton policies and procedures require that staff members and volunteers avoid abusive behavior of any kind. Staff members and volunteers are required to report any policy violations to a supervisor or a member of the First Denton Safety Team. Staff members and volunteers should have a basic understanding of the characteristics of sexual abusers and their behaviors in 'grooming' a child for sexual abuse. Grooming is the process used by an abuser to select a child, win

the child's trust (and the trust of the child's parent or 'gatekeeper'), manipulate the child into sexual activity and keep the child from disclosing the abuse.

To equip staff members and volunteers with information necessary to recognize abuser characteristics and grooming behavior, **First Denton requires all staff members and volunteers to complete sexual abuse awareness training.** This training will be renewed every two years.

### Step 3: Policies & Procedures

Staff members and volunteers are required to review the policies contained in this manual and sign the last page indicating that he or she has read and understood the material, and agrees to comply with policy requirements.

### Step 4: Criminal Background Check

First Denton requires that all staff members and volunteers working or volunteering in children's activities undergo a criminal background check. Depending upon the ministry position, differing levels or intensity of criminal background check may be required.

## **Student Safety Policy**

### Abuse Tolerance

First Denton has a **zero tolerance for abuse** in ministry programs and ministry activities. It is the responsibility of every staff member and volunteer at First Denton to act in the best interest of all children in every program.

In the event a staff member or volunteer observes any inappropriate behaviors (i.e. policy violations, neglectful supervision, poor role-modeling, etc.) or suspected abuse or neglect (physical, emotional, or sexual) it is that individual's

responsibility to immediately report their observations to an immediate supervisor and the Children’s Minister or the Executive Pastor/Business Administrator.

### Reporting Suspicious Or Inappropriate Behaviors

First Denton is committed to providing a safe, secure environment for children and their families. To this end, any report of inappropriate behaviors or suspicions of abuse or neglect will be taken seriously and will be reported, in accordance with this policy and state law, to Child Protective Services, or another appropriate agency.

Because sexual abusers ‘groom’ children for abuse, it is possible a staff member or volunteer may witness behavior intended to ‘groom’ a child for sexual abuse. Staff members and volunteers are asked to report ‘grooming’ behavior, policy violations, or any suspicious behaviors to an immediate supervisor and the Children’s Minister or the Executive Pastor/Business Administrator.

### Enforcement Of Policies

First Denton staff members and volunteers who supervise other staff members or volunteers are charged with the diligent enforcement of all Church policies. Violations of these policies are grounds for immediate dismissal, disciplinary action, or reassignment from Children’s Ministry positions for both volunteers and staff members. Final decisions related to policy violations will be the responsibility of the Executive Pastor/Business Administrator and the Personnel Committee.

## **Reporting Abuse or Suspicions of Abuse**

### Reporting Violation Of Policy

All questions or concerns related to inappropriate, suspicious, or suspected grooming behavior should be directed to an immediate supervisor in the ministry area, the Student's Minister, and/or the Executive Pastor/Business Administrator.

### Consequences Of Violation

Any person accused of committing a prohibited act or any act considered by the church to be harmful to a child will be immediately suspended from participation in Children's Ministry. This suspension will continue during any investigation by law enforcement or Child Protective agencies.

Any person found to have committed a prohibited act may be prohibited from future participation as a staff member or volunteer in all activities and programming that involves children, students or vulnerable populations at First Denton. If the person is a staff member or employee, such conduct may also result in termination of employment from First Denton.

Failure to report a policy violation is grounds for termination of an employee. Volunteers who fail to report a policy violation may be restricted from participation in any activities involving children or students at First Denton.

REPORTING SUSPICIONS OF ABUSE TO LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES  
FIRST DENTON'S POLICY IS TO REPORT **ALL** SUSPICIONS OR ALLEGATIONS OF  
ABUSE, REGARDLESS OF STATE LAW REQUIREMENTS.

### **WHEN IN DOUBT, REPORT!**

#### Response To Report Of Abuse

First Denton Leadership will take appropriate action on behalf of the church when a report of abuse occurs. At a minimum, when a report is made to a supervisor,

both parties go directly to the Student's Minister to communicate the allegations. The Student's Minister will evaluate the urgency of the circumstances using the Texas Department of Family and Protective services guidelines as communicated on their website. Urgent situations will be reported immediately using 911 and then the Texas Abuse Hotline. Less urgent situations will be reported using the online form available at <https://www.txabusehotline.org>. No matter the level of urgency, the person reporting the abuse will work with the Student's Minister to complete the online form for internal tracking purposes. This report will then be used to document and track the progress of the formal report and to communicate decision points and information to the First Denton Safety Team. Ultimately, every report, regardless of the outcome, must be reported to the First Denton Safety Team for approval of response, next steps and resolution.

## **First Denton Safety Team**

### Safety Team

Recognizing the importance of providing and maintaining a safe environment for children, First Denton will maintain a Safety Team, which will meet once each quarter.

### Mission Statement

The purpose of the Safety Team is to enable First Denton Children's and Student Ministries to carry out appropriate ministry activities while safeguarding program participants against emotional, physical or sexual abuse.

### Composition

The Safety Team will be comprised of the following staff and church members:

1. Executive Pastor
2. Business Administrator
3. Children's Minister (or their designee),
4. Student Minister (or their designee),
5. University Minister (or their designee),
6. Community Coordinator,
7. A designated member of the facilities department.

### Meetings

The Business Administrator will chair the meeting of the Safety Team on a quarterly basis to discuss risk management practices and updates. The Safety Team will also meet on an emergency basis upon the recommendation of a member or following the report of any incident or allegation.

## Responsibilities

The Safety Team will be charged with the following duties:

1. Applying existing First Denton policies and procedures related to student's safety and risk management issues.
2. Monitoring all ministry programs for children/students under the age of 18 to ensure ongoing compliance with safety policies.
3. Making recommendations to the First Denton congregation regarding safety issues.
4. Making recommendations to First Denton leadership regarding response to and care of victims of abuse.
5. Effectively communicating with the appropriate internal parties regarding safety issues. Examples of internal parties who might receive reports from this group would be the Senior Pastor, Pastoral Staff, Church Council, Deacons, Personnel Committee, etc.

The Safety Team is not responsible for communicating with external media sources. Only the Senior Pastor is authorized to communicate directly with media and then only after having consulted legal counsel.

## **Student Ministry Staff Monitoring Plan**

Monitoring of staff and volunteers will include regular (announced and unannounced) visits in each program to provide supervisors the opportunity to observe staff member and volunteer interactions with students.

1. **Each supervisor** (of employees or volunteers) conducts an unscheduled observation at least once each month for programs that occur once a week.
2. **Student's Minister** conducts written performance evaluations every twelve months for individuals in paid staff positions.
3. **Student's Minister** conducts periodic verbal performance evaluations of staff and volunteers that address participation in risk management training and adherence to risk management procedures.
4. **Executive Pastor (or his designee)** conducts an unscheduled observation of a Student's Ministry program at least once each quarter.
5. **Church Council** meets with the Student's Minister once each year to discuss the ministry, including safety training and procedures.

### Building Safety

The Student Minister will be responsible for ensuring that the Student Ministry area is monitored during Sunday classes or programming. This will include unobserved monitoring of staff members, volunteers and students in student classrooms or meetings.

No student will ever be left unattended or unsupervised during Student Ministry programs or meetings. Student Ministry staff members or volunteers are prohibited from being alone with an individual student in any room or building. In the event a staff member or volunteer finds himself/herself alone with a single student, that staff member or volunteer will take the student to a room or building occupied by others, or to a location easily observed by others.

(Example: If a student desires additional conversation or counsel with a staff member or volunteer after regular programming has concluded, move to an

adjoining room where other staff members or volunteers are present, or into a public space.)

After every programming event, staff members and volunteers must ensure every room and restroom is checked prior to leaving.

Any two students together in an unseen or less easily viewed area should be redirected to another (more open) area.

### Staff to Student Ratio

First Denton is committed to providing adequate supervision in all Student Ministry activities and programs. Accordingly, the following ratios will be observed for Student Ministry activities and programs:

For groups up to and including 10 students, there will be at least 1 staff member or volunteer supervising. For groups ranging from 11 to 29 students, there will be at least 2 staff members or volunteers supervising. For groups larger than 30 students, there will be at least 3 staff members or volunteers supervising. An individual must be at least 5 years older than the oldest participant to qualify as a “supervisor”. Typically, this means only individuals who are 22 or 23 years of age will be considered an appropriate level of supervision. Individuals who do not meet this requirement will be counted as a student in the staff to student ratio.

If a worker is out of ratio it is his or her responsibility to immediately notify supervisory staff responsible for the program or event. The responsible supervisory staff member will make diligent effort to immediately bring staff member/volunteer to student ratios into compliance with this policy.

### Discipline

It is the policy of First Denton that staff members and volunteers are prohibited from using physical discipline in any way for behavior management of children or students. **No form of physical discipline is acceptable.** This prohibition includes spanking, slapping, pinching, hitting, or any other physical force as retaliation or correction or inappropriate behaviors by students. If a student is unruly or fails to comply with verbal warnings or instructions from staff/volunteers, that student will be asked to leave (if not endangered by doing so) or the student's parent will be contacted to pick up the student. In the event of a fight or physical altercation, staff members will verbally redirect students involved and will try to avoid physical intervention. Uncontrollable or unusual behavior should be reported immediately to parents and the Student Minister.

## Intoxicants

Staff and volunteers are prohibited from the use, possession, or being under the influence of alcohol or any illegal drugs while in any church facility, while traveling with students, or while working with or supervising students.

## Nudity

Staff and volunteers in First Denton's student ministry should never be nude in the presence of students in their care. In the event there is a situation that may call for or contemplate the possibility of nudity (i.e. changing clothes during a pool party, weekend or overnight retreat, etc.), the staff member or volunteer leading the event will communicate a plan to the Student Minister concerning arrangements for showering or changing clothes.

## One-To-One Interactions with Students

First Denton recognizes that meeting the emotional needs of students may occasionally require staff member and volunteers to minister to them on an individual basis. Staff Members and volunteers should observe the following guidelines when interacting with students.

### Individual Meetings

Staff members and volunteers should conduct one-to-one meetings with an individual student at a time when others are present and where interactions can be easily observed, unless prior approval is obtained from the Student Minister.

If a closed-door meeting must occur, the student staff member must inform another staff member BEFORE the meeting occurs, the door remains unlocked and the meeting is conducted in a room that has a window or glass door.

## Transportation

Staff members and volunteers may from time to time be in a position to provide transportation for students. The following guidelines should be strictly observed when workers are involved in the transportation of students:

1. Students should be transported directly to their destination. Unauthorized stops to a non-public place should be avoided. Staff members and volunteers should avoid transportation circumstances that leave only one student in transport.
2. Staff members and volunteers should avoid physical contact with students while in vehicles.
3. No cell phones may be utilized by the driver while driving First Denton vans, or vehicles owned or rented by First Denton, unless in an emergency.
4. No drivers under age 25 may drive Church-owned or rented vehicles.

## Parental Contact

Parents whose student is participating in First Denton's Student Ministry activities and programs will be contacted if their child becomes severely ill, injured, or has a severe disciplinary problem while participating in Student Ministry programs.

## Parental Involvement

Parents have an open invitation to observe all programs and activities in which their student is involved. However, parents who desire to participate in or have

continuous, ongoing contact with Student Ministry programs will be required to complete the volunteer application and screening process.

## Physical Contact

First Denton is committed to protecting students in its care. To this end, First Denton has implemented a 'physical contact policy' that promotes a positive, nurturing environment for our Student Ministry programs. The following guidelines are to be carefully followed by anyone working in Student Ministry programs:

1. Hugging, pats on the back and other forms of appropriate physical affection between staff members or volunteers and students are important for student's development and are generally suitable in the church setting.
2. Inappropriate touching and inappropriate displays of affection are forbidden. Any inappropriate physical contact, touching or displays of affection should be immediately reported to an immediate supervisor, the Student Minister or the Executive Pastor/Business Administrator.
3. Physical contact should be for the benefit of the student, and never be based upon the emotional needs of a staff member or volunteer.
4. Physical contact and affection should be given only in observable places or when in the presence of other students or student staff members and volunteers. It is much less likely that touch will be inappropriate or misinterpreted as such when physical contact is open to observation.
5. Physical contact in any form should not give even the appearance of wrongdoing. The personal behavior of staff or volunteers in the Student Ministry must foster trust at all times. Personal conduct must be above reproach.
6. Do not force any physical contact, touch or affection upon a reluctant student. A student's preference not to be touched must be respected.
7. Student staff and volunteers are responsible for protecting students under their supervision from inappropriate or unwanted touch by others.

8. Any inappropriate behavior or suspected abuse must be reported immediately to an immediate supervisor, the Student Minister or the Executive Pastor/Business Administrator.

### Sexually Oriented Conversations

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from engaging in any sexually oriented conversations with students and are not permitted to discuss any inappropriate or explicit information about their own personal relationships, dating or sexual activities with any student in the program. However, it is expected that from time to time Student ministry discussions and lessons may address issues related to purity, dating, sex and human sexuality. These lessons will occur in group settings and will convey the church's views on these topics.

### Sexually Oriented Materials

Staff members and volunteers of are prohibited from possessing (or transmitting to any student) any sexually oriented materials (magazines, cards, images, videos, pictures, films, etc.) on church property or in the presence of students, including those in electronic form.

### Sleeping Arrangements

It is anticipated that certain Student Ministry activities may occasionally require that overnight sleeping arrangements be made for students and staff members and volunteers (i.e. camps, mission trips, etc.). In the event an activity requires sleeping arrangements, staff members and volunteers will strictly observe the following rules:

1. The 2-adult rule must be followed; no student or group of students should be alone with one staff member or volunteer, another unrelated adult must always be present.
2. All adult leaders must have previously completed the Church's screening and training process.
3. Overnight sleeping arrangements must be submitted in writing to and approved by the Student Minister prior to the activity.
4. As long as any students are awake, one trip leader must be awake and monitoring students to ensure safe behavior.
5. Leaders should check with parents and use good judgment regarding PG or PG-13 movies. No R-rated movies are permitted.
6. Appropriately modest sleeping attire must be worn; both tops and bottoms.
7. In the event of a sleepover on campus that involves both boys and girls, boys and girls must sleep in separate rooms, properly supervised by student leaders of the same gender.
8. Staff members and volunteers will monitor sleeping students by periodically conducting visual bed checks to ensure that sleeping students remain in designated sleeping places. During bed checks, staff members and volunteers should never physically touch a student.
9. Whenever possible, at least one staff member or volunteer will sleep in the same room (but not same bed) as students, or in an adjoining room with the door between the rooms kept open.
10. In the event that overnight arrangements do not include standard beds, each staff member, volunteer, and student will use single sleeping bags or blankets. In these instances, a "one-person-to-one bag or blanket" rule will be observed.

## Tobacco

First Denton requires staff members and volunteers to abstain from the use or possession of tobacco products in Church facilities, while in the presence of students or their parents, and during Church activities or programs. First Denton is a tobacco-free facility.

## Verbal Interactions

Verbal interactions between staff members or volunteers and students should be positive and uplifting. First Denton staff members and volunteers should strive to keep verbal interactions encouraging, constructive, and mindful of their mission of aiding parents in the spiritual growth and development of students.

To this end, staff members and volunteers should not talk to students in a way that is or could be construed by any reasonable observer as harsh, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating. In addition, staff and volunteers are expected to refrain from swearing in the presence of students.