



**CHILD, YOUTH & VULNERABLE ADULT SAFETY POLICY
MANDATORY STANDARDS FOR THE**

Rio Texas Conference Disaster Response Ministry

As adopted by the Rio Texas Conference Disaster Response Committee
December 11, 2018

Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church

“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me” (Mark 9:37 NRSV).

“If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones... it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6 NRSV).

Call

In response to God’s call to care for the vulnerable, Rio Texas Conference Disaster Response Ministry (RTC-DRM) is committed to the well-being of every person entrusted to its care. This commitment is in harmony with the Book of Resolutions (§162 *Social Principles*) and the baptismal covenant (*United Methodist Hymnal*).

Purpose

As part of the Rio Texas Conference, RTC-DRM is determined to provide an environment in which Participants (as defined herein) are safe from Neglect or Abuse. The scope of this policy and its provisions shall apply to all staff, volunteers, clergy, or lay persons in the RTC-DRM who have direct or indirect contact with Participants (Children, Youth, or Vulnerable Adults). This policy sets forth minimum mandatory requirements for screening and training of clergy, lay, staff, or volunteers. Implementation of mandatory ministry procedures and accountability action is required for all ministry leaders within the RTC-DRM and the Rio Texas Conference.

Commitment

In accordance with the Rio Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church Policy on Child, Youth, and Adult Safety, June 2017, RTC-Disaster Response Committee (RTC-DRC) has adopted the following set of Safety Procedures to be implemented no later than the close of Annual Conference 2018. Copies of both documents can be obtained through the Conference Mission Vitality Center – Outreach Vitality office.

This safety policy meets or exceeds the requirements of the Rio Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church Policy on Child, Youth, and Vulnerable Adult Safety, June 2017 and has been reviewed and approved by the RTC-DRC. Any future revisions shall as a minimum meet or exceed the requirements of the Rio Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church Policy on Child, Youth, and Vulnerable Adult Safety, June 2017, and be reviewed and approved by the RTC-DRC before implementation.

The RTC-DRM is fortunate to have persons with exceptional talent for teaching and supporting the spiritual nurture of our children, youth and vulnerable adults as is applicable in the ministry. We wish to encourage them to use their spiritual gifts. These safety procedures are for the well-being of our children, youth, and vulnerable adults participating in the RTC-DRM. We recognize that safety is an issue that involves the whole church family, not just



those who work directly in ministry with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. Therefore, we are asking all of our church family to be informed and help us provide a safe environment for ministry.

Definitions

- A. **Abuse:** is any deliberate act that inflicts bodily or emotional harm to a Participant. Abuse includes: (a) the infliction of physical or emotional injury by other than accidental means; (b) the creation of a risk, or allowing the creation of risk, to a Participant by other than accidental means; (c) committing or allowing to be committed an act of Sexual Abuse, Sexual Exploitation, or prostitution upon the Participant.
- B. **Adult Leader: is any person** including any paid employee, volunteer, clergy, or lay person in the conference, district, or local church who has the responsibility for the care and Supervision of a Participant at an event. Adult Leaders shall no longer be in High School.
- C. **Applicant:** is any person 18 years of age or older seeking to become an Adult Leader in a local church or for a district or conference event.
- D. **Assistant Leader:** is any person 16 years of age or older who has been through the application and safety certification process, but does not qualify for a background check. These are still considered to be Participants and cannot fill the role of a mandatory Adult Leader.
- E. **Day Ministry Event:** is an activity, or occasion sponsored by RTC-DRC that involves a gathering and care of Participants during the hours of 7:00am-10:00pm, and does not occur for more than four hours per day in duration of four or more consecutive days.
- F. **Exploitation:** is obtaining or using another person's income, assets, or possessions with the intent to deprive the person of those resources.
- G. **Neglect:** is failure to provide nutrition, medical, surgical, or any other care necessary for the well-being of the Participants.
- H. **Overnight/Extended Hour Ministry Event:** a local church, conference, or district sponsored activity, or occasion that involves a gathering and care of Participants for more than four hours per day in duration of four consecutive days or involves an overnight stay.
- I. **Participant:** is a Child, Youth, or Vulnerable Adult that is registered, enrolled, attending, or otherwise participating in an event or activity sponsored by RTC-DRC.
 - 1. **Child:** is any person 11 years of age or younger.
 - 2. **Youth:** is a person 12-17 years of age.
 - 3. **Vulnerable Adult:** persons over 18 years of age with physical, mental, and/or developmental disabilities.
- J. **Prostitution:** to engage in, to offer to engage, or to force a Participant to engage in sexual contact by either soliciting or receiving a fee or other benefit.
- K. **Rule of Three:** The presence of two unrelated Adult Leaders at all ministry events involving Participants. Any engagement with a Participant requires the presence of two Adult Leaders.
- L. **Safety Policy Administrator:** The Conference Mission Vitality Center – Office of Outreach Vitality Director and Administrative Support Staff will serve as Safety Policy Administrator and are charged with the maintenance, implementation, and enforcement of the RTC-DRM Safety Policy. The Safety Policy Administrator will work with the RTC-DRC to help with this task, but the Safety Policy Administrator retains overall responsibility. The Safety Policy Administrator reports directly to the Conference Director of Connectional Ministries. The main focus of administering the Safety Policy is through the Disaster Response training which will lay out the expectation of compliance with the Safety Policy in the RTC-DRM,



the Rio Texas Conference, and the local church’s adopted and adapted Safety Policy per Rio Texas Conference mandate. Trained Early Response Team (ERT) Leaders will be responsible with the administration of the Safety Policy process in connection with the trained ERT Leader’s local church as the ERT’s sponsoring agent.

- M. **Sexual Abuse:** is any sexual contact, sexually explicit language, gestures, or images directed to a Participant.
- N. **Sexual Exploitation:** is any deliberate act that allows or encourages a Participant to engage in an act of obscene or pornographic photography, filming, or depiction of a Participant as prohibited under Texas law.
- O. **Supervision:** is the leadership role of a person who is in charge of a group of Participants, giving direction, setting boundaries, disciplining appropriately, maintaining safety and being the leader in all situations. The ERT Team Leader will apply the local church’s Safety Policy expectation regarding Supervision.

SAFE MINISTRY MANDATES

In accordance with the Rio Texas Conference Safety policy, the RTC-DRC commits to provide adequate Supervision from Adult Leaders. This expectation of adequate provision is outlined in the RTC-DR Team Leader Training Course and materials [See Addendum Document]. The RTC-DRM is ultimately a ministry of the local church from where ERTs originate. Therefore, the expectations of the RTC-DRC Safety Policy compliments, supports, and may possibly exceed the policy of the local church.

The RTC-DRC requires that each ERT have at minimum, 2 non-related persons fully Trusted Con Confianza trained and certified to be bearers and administrators of this Safety Policy during ERT deployments. The 2 fully trained and certified persons should have such standing prior to the execution of the ERT Deployment.

The RTC-DRC encourages that eventually, all local church ERT Team members will be fully Trusted Con Confianza trained and certified. The RTC-ERT Team Leader Training outlines that ideally, the Trusted Con Confianza training and certification process be completed by the entire local church ERT as part of the preparation process prior to ERT deployment.

Early Response Teams are unique in that only adults over the age of 18 are permitted to serve in this capacity. Although this requirement minimizes some of the supervision requirements, these teams are still in contact with children, youth and vulnerable persons in the clients that we serve as well as in the churches where we are housed during deployment.

- A. All ministry events with Participants shall follow the Rule of Three with a minimum of one Adult Leader for every eight Participants. Recommended ratios include: Safe Ratios (following the National Association for the Education of Young Children guidelines for safety):
 - a. infants- 1:3
 - b. toddlers- 1:4
 - c. children- 1:6
 - d. Youth- 1:8



- e. Special needs: The ERT Team Leader should endeavor to provide a buddy/faith friend for vulnerable adult team members with special needs. This is in addition to the required 2 certified adult minimum.
- B. Any one-to-one mentoring or consulting shall be conducted in sight of another Adult Leader. The ERT will apply the local church's Safety Policy expectation regarding mentoring and consulting.
- C. Adult Leaders and Assistant Leaders working with children and youth must be at least five years older than the oldest Participants with whom they work.
- D. Assistant Leaders must work under the Supervision of two Adult Leaders.
- E. Overnight Ministry Events
 - 1. Co-ed Overnight Ministry Events require co-ed Adult Leaders.
 - 2. Sleeping accommodations shall include sleeping distance of no less than three feet between Adult Leaders, Assistant Leaders, and Participants.
 - 3. Every Participant shall have a completed medical release and parental/legal guardian permission form before they will be permitted to participate at any Overnight Ministry Event.
 - 4. The ERT will apply the local church's Safety Policy expectation regarding expected practices and overnight ministry events.
- F. Travel
 - 1. Only Adult Leaders will be permitted to drive Participants to ministry events. Drivers must be:
 - a. 21 years or older
 - b. have a valid driver's license
 - c. proof of insurance at the state's minimum limits
 - d. not be otherwise disqualified from driving (i.e., under medication, impaired, etc.).
 - 2. Written permission from a parent/legal guardian is required for events requiring transportation to and from the event location.
 - 3. The ERT will apply the local church's Safety Policy expectation regarding expected practices for driving.
- G. Phone, video, and online communication:
 - 1. Adult Leaders must notify parents/legal guardians before requesting access, friending, texting, contacting a Participant via social media, or using any other form of online phone/video communication.
 - 2. Using the Rule of Three, all group or social media communications must include two Adult Leaders who serve as administrators/moderators. All groups must be closed, private, and shall require the site administrator's approval to join.
 - 3. The ERT will apply the local church's Safety Policy expectation regarding expected practices for phone, video, and/or online communication.
 - 4. Adult Leaders shall not photograph Participants for use on internet or in print media without written permission of parent/legal guardian. A Social Media best practice resource will be provided by the Mission Vitality Center. The ERT will apply the local church's Safety Policy expectation regarding expected practices for photography.



IMPLEMENTATION: SCREENING, TRAINING, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

A. SCREENING

1. Adult Leaders and Assistant Leaders shall submit an application for ministry along with three (work, volunteer, or ministry) references.
2. Applicants should be active in the local church/ministry for a minimum of six months prior to the event or provide additional references affirming their positive leadership with Participants in another ministry setting. In the case of new staff hires, references deemed adequate by the hiring supervisor will replace the six-month waiting period. In the case of Adult Ministry Leaders or Assistant Leaders, previous ministry experience within the Rio Texas Conference may be transferred in lieu of the six-month waiting period pending approval of Rio Texas Conference office.
3. References shall be checked by conference, district, or local church staff responsible for Applicants.
4. Adult Leaders shall:
 - a. Submit a signed authorization form for a criminal background screening to be completed by the Rio Texas Conference office every two years. This will include a signed statement that they are not aware of any allegations that would prevent them from working with Participants.
 - b. If results of the screening raise questions about fitness of the Applicant, the Rio Texas Conference office shall disapprove the application and notify the event leader and/or local church. Results of criminal background screenings shall be kept confidential. Applicants can request that the conference office share the results of their criminal background screening with another district or local church in the Rio Texas Conference via a signed request authorization form.
5. The ERT will apply the local church's Safety Policy expectation regarding expected practices for screening.

B. TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION

All Adult Leaders and Assistant Leaders must be certified for their work at conference, district, and local church events. Certification includes:

1. Evaluation of and submission of the local church policy every year. As local church leaders undergo the ERT Team Leader Training, the training will make references to the local church's Safety Policy.
2. Completion of Abuse prevention training every year.
3. Safety Certification every two years. Certification will include the following modules:
 - a. Overview of Rio Texas Conference policy.
 - b. Abuse prevention.
 - c. Creating safe spaces, best practices for ministry, sexual ethics and appropriate leader behavior.
 - d. Overnight/extended hour ministry training.
 - e. The certification process will be designed by the Rio Texas Conference and will be offered by trained persons in every district.
4. The Conference Mission Vitality Center – Office of Outreach Vitality Director and Administrative Support Staff serve as Safety Policy Administrator for the RTC-DRM. There is no advanced Team Leader training. Pertaining to DR Leader trained persons and ERT Team members:



- a. The Safety Policy Administrator is responsible for accessing the conference database to determine if RTC-DRM volunteers are Trusted Con Confianza trained and certified as documented in Safe Gatherings.
- b. The ERT's local church Safety Policy Administrator shall ensure that each Adult Leader reviews the provisions of this Safety Policy at least annually.
- c. The ERT's local church Safety Policy Administrator shall participate in the reporting of all allegations of abuse.

C. ACCOUNTABILITY

1. Every ministry of the Rio Texas Annual Conference, district, and local church shall have a policy that is compliant with the minimum standards of this Rio Texas Policy and must review their policy annually.
2. The Mission Vitality Center at the Rio Texas Conference office will work alongside district staff to ensure that policies are adopted and followed.
3. The Rio Texas Conference Uniting Table in consultation with the Conference Mission Vitality Center shall be responsible for reviewing and revising the Rio Texas Child, Youth and Vulnerable Adult Safety Policy.
4. Local churches shall submit their policy and a report on how they are in compliance with their policy annually to the District Superintendent at their charge or church conference.
5. Clergy shall document the date and facilitator when they complete safety certification to their District Superintendent annually via the annual inventory/clergy consultation form.
6. District staff will annually submit a report to the Mission Vitality Center and Office of Intergenerational Discipleship, identifying churches who are in compliance with this policy and/or those still in need of a policy or training.
7. The Mission Vitality Center will work with districts and local churches to keep track of and ensure all conference, district, and local church ministries are in compliance with this policy.
8. A copy of the conference procedures shall be retained in the Rio Texas Conference office.

REPORTING ABUSE

The RTC-DRC procedures for reporting Abuse are as follows:

- A. All reports of alleged Abuse should be documented in writing and brought immediately to the attention of the local church's ERT leaders. The ERT leader will then be responsible to inform the local church's senior pastor and per the local church's Safety Policy protocols for reporting abuse. Likewise, the RTC-DR Safety Policy Administrator should be informed of the situation. Texas is a mandatory reporting state. Reports of Abuse, Neglect, Exploitation or Sexual Exploitation of Participants shall be made within 48 hours of suspicion to the Department of Family and Protective services through the Texas Abuse Hotline: 1-800-252-5400 or www.txabusehotline.org. Adult Leaders shall report all abuse by anyone- No Abuse should be considered trivial and not reported.
- B. Any Adult Leader or Assistant Leader accused of Abuse shall be immediately relieved of duties related to any conference, district, or local church event.
- C. In the case of Abuse allegations, the senior pastor, District Superintendent, and/or Bishop shall be notified immediately. Parents or legal guardians should be notified in appropriate circumstances.
- D. It shall be the goal to provide supportive care to both the victim and the accused and to restore such persons to wholeness. The RTC-DRC and the local church shall provide a supportive atmosphere to all those who are



affected, offering both objectivity and empathy as it seeks to create a climate in which healing can take place. Supportive care can include the procedures of the criminal justice system, provisions of the current Book of Discipline, appropriate counseling referrals and continued pastoral visitation.

- E. Statement to the Media: The Conference media center has guidelines available for communications with media about the incident(s) which may have been reported.

It is a privilege to work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. Great responsibility is required. Those who violate this policy shall immediately be removed from contact with children and youth. Appropriate authorities shall be notified immediately.

Addendum Information

In addition to the *Trusted* protocols, Early Response Team volunteers are trained by authorized UMCOR trainers and are issued UMCOR ERT Badges. These UMCOR-issued badges demonstrate our UMCOR affiliation to civil authorities working in disaster response and often times allow us early entry into affected areas not accessible to unaffiliated volunteers or even residents. As such, UMCOR requires that every badged volunteer pass an additional background check. These background checks are administered by UMCOR and are good for three years.



Rio Texas Conference ERT Process

COORDINATION & TRAINING

- 1 **Individuals**
- Complete ERT Basic training
 - Complete UMCOR Background Check
 - Are badged for three years

Note: ERT Training includes discussion of *Trusted* policy and participants are encouraged to complete the three-part *Trusted* certification process.

- 2 **Individuals are encouraged to**
- Join /form ERT in their local church or
 - Connect with a nearby team
 - Pursue ERT Advanced Training (Team Leader, Site Assessment, Cleanup,)

Note: Team Leader training emphasizes need for *Trusted* training within the team membership in order to deploy.

DEPLOYMENT PREPARATION

- 3 **Local Church Team Leaders:**
- Complete Team Leader training, and gain understanding of their role in *Trusted* compliance
 - Verify *Trusted* training and compliance of Team Members through the local church
 - Encourage Team Members to complete *Trusted* certification
 - Query team members for availability to deploy
 - Determine who will fulfill the ratios needed for deployment
 - Conduct *Trusted* briefing and training with team members

- 4 **Individual ERTs:**
- Complete *Trusted* Training and notify Team Leaders of compliance

DEPLOYMENT

- 5 **Local Church Team Leader**
- Registers Team for deployment,
 - Identifies by name and date trained for the *Trusted*-compliant Team Members who will be fulfilling the required ratios.