



North Alabama Conference Safe Sanctuaries Policy Review Checklist

Form Revised July 2022 (Policy Revised June 2021)

Church Name: _____

District: _____

Reviewed by: _____ **Date:** _____

Policy Updated: _____

How to Use this Checklist

The North Alabama Conference Safe Sanctuaries policy includes recommended minimum standards for local church and ministry Safe Sanctuaries policies. These standards represent best practices for most policies, and churches are encouraged to incorporate them into their local policy. However, each church is expected to consider their own unique context and develop a policy appropriate to it, which may include requirements other than those listed here. For most churches, this form can be used to review local church/ministry policies either as a self-assessment tool by the local church or ministry, or as part of a training conducted by a district trainer. For details, please refer to www.umcna.org/safesanctuaries or contact your district office.

For each item, mark “Y” (Yes) if the answer to the question is always affirmative, “P” (Partial) if it is sometimes but not always affirmative, “N” (No) if it is never affirmative, or “NA” (Not Applicable) if it is not applicable to the church’s context. Explain any P or N answers in the comments section, as well as any NA answers for items in red with an asterisk (*). For additional guidance, see the attached instruction sheet. **Items in red with an asterisk (*) are included in the minimum recommended standards for local churches as described in the Conference policy and should be addressed in an update to the local church’s policy as soon as possible.** Additional items listed are considered best practices which may be recommended depending on the church’s context.

Note that this checklist should be completed based on the text of the policy. In some cases, a church may in practice be in compliance with a recommendation, but it should be indicated if it is not a requirement as defined in the policy. Additionally, you may mark “yes” if a church exceeds the requirements described here.

#	Question	Y	P	N	NA	Comments
Policy Components						
1	Does the policy include an introduction, including theological and philosophical foundations?					
2	Does the policy define its scope, including when it is and is not in effect?					
3	Does the policy include key definitions necessary to understanding the policy?					
4	Does the policy include provisions related to the screening and training of staff and volunteers?					

#	Question	Y	P	N	N A	Comments
5	Does the policy include provisions related to the supervision of children and youth?					
6	Does the policy include provisions for reporting and responding to instances of observed or suspected abuse?					
7	Does the policy include a revision schedule and procedures?					
Leadership Training and Screening						
8	*Are volunteers and staff working directly with children or youth required to complete a background check prior to serving?					
9	Does the policy require that the church run background checks on all staff and volunteers and make clear that third-party background checks cannot be accepted?					
10	*Do background checks conducted by the church on volunteers and staff who work with children or youth include all of the following? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Social Security trace ● State of Alabama criminal check ● National (multijurisdictional) criminal check ● National sex offender registry (if not part of the national criminal check) 					
11	*Are background checks for staff and volunteers who work with children or youth valid for no more than three (3) years?					
12	Are background checks for staff valid for no more than one (1) year?					
13	Are all staff required to complete background checks regardless of whether they will be working directly with children or youth?					
14	Does the policy include a process for processing adverse background check results?					
15	*Are volunteers and staff who work with children or youth required to complete training on the church's Safe Sanctuaries policy prior to serving?					
16	Are all staff required to complete Safe Sanctuaries training regardless of whether they will be working directly with children or youth?					

#	Question	Y	P	N	N A	Comments
17	*Is refresher training on the church's Safe Sanctuaries policy required for all volunteers and staff who work with children or youth at least every three (3) years or within six (6) months of a change to the church's policy?					
18	Does the policy require more frequent refresher training for volunteers and staff who do not regularly work with children or youth?					
19	*Does the policy require training to be offered by a certified district trainer not less than once per year?					
20	Does the policy describe a process for "quick-training" new staff and volunteers who begin serving before a trainer-led training?					
Supervision Requirements						
21	*Are volunteers and staff who work with children and youth required to be at least eighteen (18) years of age?					
22	*Are volunteers and staff serving as leaders of children and youth required to be no less than five (5) years older than the oldest member of the group they are leading unless the church has made an allowance for paid staff?					
23	Does the policy describe what staff positions can be exempted from the five-year rule and define an approval process for exemption?					
24	*Are volunteers and staff who work with children and youth required to have been active in the congregation for not less than six (6) months prior to serving unless the church has established a process and exempted an individual from this requirement?					
25	Does the policy define what "active" means for purposes of the six-month rule?					
26	*Are volunteers and staff responsible for no more than ten (10) minors per leader?					
27	Does the policy describe graduated ratios where leaders are responsible for fewer children at younger ages?					

#	Question	Y	P	N	N A	Comments
28	*Are two non-related and non-cohabitating adults required to be present any time children or youth meet, unless the local church allows for floaters, caravans, or "least-related" service?					
29	Does the policy define requirements for serving as a floater?					
30	Does the policy define requirements for caravans?					
31	Does the policy establish a check-in/check-out process for children and youth?					
Transportation/Overnight Events						
32	*Are drivers required to be qualified as leaders?					
33	*Are drivers required to complete a motor vehicle record check and provide proof of insurance in addition to their standard background check?					
34	Are trustees guidelines for the use of church vehicles required to be followed?					
35	Are additional requirements for drivers required or recommended by the church's insurance carrier incorporated into the policy?					
36	*Are chaperones for overnight events required to be the same gender as the children or youth being chaperoned?					
37	*Are adults prohibited from sharing a bed or being alone in a room with any child including their own?					
38	*Does the policy include guidelines for the selection of accommodations such as preferring hotels (rooms open to an interior hallway) over motels (rooms open to the outside)?					
39	*Are medical and liability release forms required to be collected?					
40	*Do medical and liability release forms capture contact information for parents/guardians and related information?					

#	Question	Y	P	N	N A	Comments
41	Does the policy prohibit youth driving themselves and/or other youth during church events?					
42	Does the policy prohibit or require parents to give permission before youth can be driven from events by other youth, including siblings?					
Response and Reporting						
43	Does the policy affirm the church's role in reporting observed or suspected abuse both in the context of the church's programming and outside of the church?					
44	<i>*Is voluntary/permissive reporting encouraged in the policy?</i>					
45	<i>*Are mandatory reporters defined in the policy?</i>					
46	Does the policy require that reports of observed or suspected abuse be made to law enforcement or the Department of Human Resources by the person who observed or suspected the abuse?					
47	<i>*Does the policy define a plan for responding to observed or suspected abuse, including by clergy?</i>					
48	Does the policy designate a spokesperson and an alternate?					
Policy Revision						
49	Does the policy designate a Safe Sanctuaries team that is responsible for recommending updates to the policy and advising staff and volunteers on its implementation?					
50	Does the policy establish a minimum update frequency?					
51	Does the policy describe what body is authorized to amend the policy?					

Training Details

It is recommended that you record the details of your most recent training here for your records.

Last Training Conducted by: _____

Last Training Date: _____

Comments:

Checklist Instructions

Below you will find a description of each item discussed on the checklist, including additional details about what should be included in the policy. On the checklist, each item should be marked with one of the following:

Yes (Y): The policy meets or exceeds the listed requirement.

Partial (P): The policy partially meets the listed requirement. For instance, if the church requires a national criminal check as part of their background check but not a state one, they should mark “P”.

No (N): The policy does not meet the listed requirement.

Not Applicable (NA): The listed requirement is not applicable to the church’s context. Note that NA should generally not be marked for items in red, and if it is an explanation should be provided.

#	Question	Description
Policy Components This section outlines the basic components of all policies. While policies do not have to follow this exact structure, each of these components should substantially be included.		
1	Does the policy include an introduction, including theological and philosophical foundations?	The policy should include an introduction that includes theological, scriptural, and philosophical foundations for <i>why</i> Safe Sanctuaries is important.
2	Does the policy define its scope, including when it is and is not in effect?	The policy should have a clearly defined scope that clarifies when the policy is and is not in effect. This is often based around a check-in/check-out system.
3	Does the policy include key definitions necessary to understanding the policy?	The policy should include key definitions necessary to understanding the policy. While many terms are self-explanatory, some, such as the definition of “minor”, may vary from church to church.
4	Does the policy include provisions related to the screening and training of staff and volunteers?	The policy should include provisions related to the screening and training of staff and volunteers. These are covered in depth on this checklist.
5	Does the policy include provisions related to the supervision of children and youth?	The policy should include provisions related to the supervision of children and youth. These are covered in depth on this checklist.
6	Does the policy include provisions for reporting and responding to instances of observed or suspected abuse?	The policy should include provisions related to responding to and reporting observed or suspected abuse. These are covered in depth on this checklist.

#	Question	Description
7	Does the policy include a revision schedule and procedures?	The policy should include provisions related to revising and updating the policy. These are covered in depth on this checklist.
Leadership Training and Screening This section covers topics related to the training and screening of staff and volunteers, primarily those who will work directly with children or youth.		
8	*Are volunteers and staff working directly with children or youth required to complete a background check prior to serving?	All volunteers and staff who work directly with children or youth should be required to complete a background check prior to serving. The exception to this rule is youth helpers under the age of 18 who do not need to complete a background check, but should have on file a signed statement from their parent(s) or guardian(s) stating they know of no reason the youth cannot serve.
9	Does the policy require that the church run background checks on all staff and volunteers and make clear that third-party background checks cannot be accepted?	Part of a church's due diligence involves conducting its own background checks on staff and volunteers, and third-party background checks (such as from a prospective volunteer's employer or another volunteer organization) cannot be accepted. It is a best practice to state this explicitly in the policy and require that all staff and volunteers complete background checks directly through the church.
10	*Do background checks conducted by the church on volunteers and staff who work with children or youth include all of the following? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Security trace • State of Alabama criminal check • National (multijurisdictional) criminal check • National sex offender registry (if not part of the national criminal check) 	These four components must be included in any Safe Sanctuaries background check. Background checks run by GHRR, the Conference's background check provider, will always include these checks. If churches do not have a branch account through GHRR, they should ensure that their background check vendor conducts each of these checks.
11	*Are background checks for staff and volunteers who work with children or youth valid for no more than three (3) years?	Background checks for staff and volunteers who work with children or youth should be valid for no more than three years, which coincides with the required frequency for refresher training.
12	Are background checks for staff valid for no more than one (1) year?	It is recommended that background checks for staff, particularly those in a preschool or daycare environment who may have minimal supervision, be renewed on an annual basis.
13	Are all staff required to complete background checks regardless of whether they will be working directly with children or youth?	It is a best practice to conduct background checks on all staff, not just those who will be working with children or youth.

#	Question	Description
14	Does the policy include a process for processing adverse background check results?	It is recommended that the policy establish a process for handling adverse background check results. These results should be reviewed by a team rather than an individual, and involve outside advice as appropriate.
15	*Are volunteers and staff who work with children or youth required to complete training on the church's Safe Sanctuaries policy prior to serving?	All volunteers and staff who work with children or youth should be required to complete Safe Sanctuaries training prior to serving. This may be completed as a quick-train conducted by church staff or leadership using materials provided by a district trainer, or it may be completed through a trainer-led training.
16	Are all staff required to complete Safe Sanctuaries training regardless of whether they will be working directly with children or youth?	It is recommended that all staff, including those who will not work directly with children or youth, complete at least an introductory training that covers reporting procedures if they observe something that gives them cause for concern.
17	*Is refresher training on the church's Safe Sanctuaries policy required for all volunteers and staff who work with children or youth at least every three (3) years or within six (6) months of a change to the church's policy?	Volunteers and staff should be required to complete refresher Safe Sanctuaries training at least every three (3) years. Refresher training should also be required within six (6) months of an update to the church's policy.
18	Does the policy require more frequent refresher training for volunteers and staff who do not regularly work with children or youth?	It is a best practice to require more frequent refresher training for volunteers and staff who do not regularly work with children or youth and thus are not regularly exposed to Safe Sanctuaries procedures. For instance, it may be helpful to hold a special Safe Sanctuaries training as part of orientation for one-time volunteers at events such as Vacation Bible School.
19	*Does the policy require training to be offered by a certified district trainer not less than once per year?	Churches are required to <u>offer</u> a training by a district trainer at least annually for volunteers and staff who are due for a refresher training, new volunteers and staff who have not been trained, or new volunteers and staff who have only completed a quick-train.
20	Does the policy describe a process for "quick-training" new staff and volunteers who begin serving before a trainer-led training?	It is a best practice to establish in the policy a process for "quick-training" new staff and volunteers. Quick-trains are conducted by church staff or leadership using materials provided by a district trainer and are intended to allow a new staff member or volunteer to begin serving before the next scheduled trainer-led training. Staff and volunteers who conduct a quick-train should be required to complete a trainer-led training at the next available opportunity.

#	Question	Description
Supervision Requirements This section covers policies and procedures related to the supervision of children and youth.		
21	*Are volunteers and staff who work with children and youth required to be at least eighteen (18) years of age?	Any leaders, whether volunteer or staff, working with children or youth should be required to be at least eighteen (18) years of age. As a best practice, churches may wish to raise this minimum age further.
22	*Are volunteers and staff serving as leaders of children and youth required to be no less than five (5) years older than the oldest member of the group they are leading unless the church has made an allowance for paid staff?	In addition to being at least 18, volunteers and staff who are working with children and youth are required to be at least 5 years older than the oldest member of the group they are leading. Churches may make an exception to this rule for paid staff who lead groups of children or youth as part of their job, and the possibility of an exception should be detailed in the policy.
23	Does the policy describe what staff positions can be exempted from the five-year rule and define an approval process for exemption?	If the church creates an exception to the five-year rule for paid staff, it is a best practice to detail in the policy what types of positions can be exempted and what the approval process for an exemption is.
24	*Are volunteers and staff who work with children and youth required to have been active in the congregation for not less than six (6) months prior to serving unless the church has established a process and exempted an individual from this requirement?	Volunteers and staff who work with children or youth should be active in the congregation for at least 6 months prior to serving both as an act of hospitality and to give the church an opportunity to better get to know them. The church may make an exception which should be detailed in the policy for paid staff who work with children or youth as part of their job.
25	Does the policy define what “active” means for purposes of the six-month rule?	It is recommended that churches define “active” for purposes of the six-month rule.
26	*Are volunteers and staff responsible for no more than ten (10) minors per leader?	Notwithstanding the two-adult rule, a single leader should never be responsible for more than 10 children or youth at a given time.
27	Does the policy describe graduated ratios where leaders are responsible for fewer children at younger ages?	It is recommended that churches establish graduated ratios of minors to leaders so that leaders are responsible for fewer younger children. For instance, many churches have a ratio of 3-to-1 for nursery-age children, 5-to-1 for preschool age children, 8-to-1 for elementary age children, and 10-to-1 beginning in middle school.

#	Question	Description
28	*Are two non-related and non-cohabitating adults required to be present any time children or youth meet, unless the local church allows for floaters, caravans, or "least-related" service?	At least two non-related and non-cohabitating adults must be present in any group of children or youth. If this is not practical in a church's context, the policy may allow for "least-related" adults to serve together. The church may also make limited exceptions for the use of floaters (who serve as a roving second adult for multiple smaller groups of children and youth) and caravans (where vehicles traveling together start and stop at the same time).
29	Does the policy define requirements for serving as a floater?	<p>If the church creates an exception to the two-adult rule for floaters, it is recommended that the policy detail requirements for floaters. In general, floaters should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have no responsibilities (such as taking offerings or attendance reports to the office) other than serving as a floater • Be qualified as leaders for all groups for which they are serving as a floater, including adhering to the five-year rule • Only be responsible for rooms or areas that are in their direct line of sight, meaning all areas are on the same building, floor, and hallway • Have full visibility of and access to all areas where minors are meeting for which they are serving as a floater from the hallway
30	Does the policy define requirements for caravans?	<p>If the church creates an exception to the two-adult rule for caravans, it is recommended that the policy detail requirements for caravans. In general, caravans should start and stop simultaneously and, to the extent possible, remain within sight of each other while on the road.</p>
31	Does the policy establish a check-in/check-out process for children and youth?	It is a best practice for churches to establish a check-in and check-out process for children and youth. This process should clearly define when children and youth enter the church's care and when they leave it including who is allowed to check children and youth out of the church's care.
Transportation/Overnight Events		
32	*Are drivers required to be qualified as leaders?	Drivers should be required to be qualified as leaders for all children or youth they will be transporting, including adhering to the five-year rule.

#	Question	Description
33	*Are drivers required to complete a motor vehicle record check and provide proof of insurance in addition to their standard background check?	Drivers should be required to complete a motor vehicle record (MVR) check and provide proof of insurance in addition to their standard background check prior to transporting children or youth.
34	Are trustees guidelines for the use of church vehicles required to be followed?	It is recommended that the policy include a statement requiring that any trustees guidelines for the use of church-owned or rented vehicles be followed.
35	Are additional requirements for drivers required or recommended by the church's insurance carrier incorporated into the policy?	It is recommended that the church's insurance carrier be consulted in developing the transportation section of the policy to provide any recommendations for further requirements beyond those required for Safe Sanctuaries. These may include higher minimum ages for drivers, additional training, and other components. Note that these requirements may be defined in a vehicle policy developed by the church's Board of Trustees instead of or in addition to the Safe Sanctuaries policy.
36	*Are chaperones for overnight events required to be the same gender as the children or youth being chaperoned?	Chaperones for overnight events should be required to be the same gender as the children or youth being chaperoned, meaning that if both male and female students are on a trip then there should be both male and female chaperones.
37	*Are adults prohibited from sharing a bed or being alone in a room with any child including their own?	Adults are prohibited from being alone in a room or sharing a bed with any child, including their own, while participating in church events.
38	*Does the policy include guidelines for the selection of accommodations such as preferring hotels (rooms open to an interior hallway) over motels (rooms open to the outside)?	The policy should include guidelines for the selection of accommodations such as preferring hotels over motels.
39	*Are medical and liability release forms required to be collected?	Medical and liability release forms should be required to be collected prior to transporting children and youth.
40	*Do medical and liability release forms capture contact information for parents/guardians and related information?	Medical and liability release forms should capture, at minimum, contact information for parents or guardians and details about any medical concerns for the minor.
41	Does the policy prohibit youth driving themselves and/or other youth during church events?	It is recommended that policies prohibit youth from driving themselves or other youth during church events (for instance, youth should not be allowed to drive themselves from the church to an off-site activity).

#	Question	Description
42	Does the policy prohibit or require parents to give permission before youth can be driven from events by other youth, including siblings?	If the church allows youth to be transported from the church by other youth, the policy should require that permission from the parents or guardians of both the driver and passenger(s) be provided in writing.
Response and Reporting This section addresses steps to be taken to respond to and report observed or suspected abuse whether in the context of the church's programs or outside of the church.		
43	Does the policy affirm the church's role in reporting observed or suspected abuse both in the context of the church's programming and outside of the church?	The policy should encourage reporting of observed or suspected abuse that occurs not only during church programming but also outside of the church. This may include abuse that is observed or suspected by church staff or volunteers, as well as abuse which a minor discloses to church personnel.
44	<i>*Is voluntary/permissive reporting encouraged in the policy?</i>	The policy should encourage voluntary (or permissive) reporting by individuals who are not considered mandatory reporters under state law.
45	<i>*Are mandatory reporters defined in the policy?</i>	The policy should identify mandatory reporters as described in state law and affirm their reporting responsibility.
46	Does the policy require that reports of observed or suspected abuse be made to law enforcement or the Department of Human Resources by the person who observed or suspected the abuse?	It is recommended that the policy require that the person who observed or suspected abuse be the one to report it to law enforcement or the Department of Human Resources. Note that this does not preclude initially notifying and consulting with the individual's supervisor.
47	<i>*Does the policy define a plan for responding to observed or suspected abuse, including by clergy?</i>	The policy should define a plan for responding to observed or suspected abuse. This should include notification of both church and civil authorities. The plan should specify that it is the pastor's responsibility to notify the district superintendent or, if the pastor is implicated, this responsibility falls to the chair of the Staff/Pastor-Parish Relations Committee.
48	Does the policy designate a spokesperson and an alternate?	The policy should designate a spokesperson, which may be the church's district superintendent. It is recommended that an alternate spokesperson be designated in the event that the default spokesperson is implicated in an incident or otherwise unavailable.
Policy Revision This section describes the process for reviewing and updating the policy on an ongoing basis.		

#	Question	Description
49	Does the policy designate a Safe Sanctuaries team that is responsible for recommending updates to the policy and advising staff and volunteers on its implementation?	It is recommended that all churches have a Safe Sanctuaries team that is responsible for the policy on an ongoing basis. This team is responsible for regularly reviewing the policy to ensure it is appropriate for the church's context and that it adheres to current best practices. This team can also advise church staff and volunteers on the ongoing implementation of the policy including how to implement its requirements, advising on adverse background check results, and providing other similar advice.
50	Does the policy establish a minimum update frequency?	The policy should establish a minimum frequency that it will undergo a comprehensive review and update, for instance, every three years. Note that it is a best practice to review the policy at least annually to ensure it continues to be applicable to the church's context.
51	Does the policy describe what body is authorized to amend the policy?	The policy should describe what body such as the church council or administrative board is authorized to amend the policy in the future.