



**westover's child protection program**

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**Westover Hills Church of Christ**

**KidSafe Policy**

**Revision 3.0**





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## KidSafe Charter

The Westover Hills Church of Christ commits to providing a safe and caring environment for the Children of our Members and guests. In order to promote this ideal, the Elders on behalf of the Westover Hills Church of Christ adopt the policies and procedures set forth in this Child Protection Policy and Procedures document. The Elders pray that Westover will never experience the harms afflicted upon Children at other churches and organizations. The Elders accordingly entreat all persons entrusted with the care of our Children to abide by this Child Protection Policy and Procedures document and endeavor to perform their responsibilities and exercise their authority prayerfully and diligently in a Christ-like manner, always with humility, grace, and, most of all, with love.

## Document Scope

This document defines child protection policies and procedures to be followed at Westover. These policies provide physical and emotional protection for our Children, as well as legal protection for Westover and its Staff & Volunteers who work with Children. Because the policies and procedure have legal ramifications, this is a legal document. However, legal documents can eliminate some subjectivity needed by the Elders when practicing the spiritual leadership to which they have been called. To allow some subjectivity, and to avoid a comprehensive document that describes every conceivable violation, this document strives to define the policies and procedures in a manner that does not eliminate the human and spiritual element. This is accomplished using the following model:

- A policy or procedure is defined in a general way that covers the heart of the policy or the procedure
- Where applicable, recommendations are made concerning the implementation of the policy or procedure. This recommendations describe the implementation that optimally preserves child safety and legal protection for Westover and its volunteers

While encouraged to follow the recommendations, the Elders can elect to modify the implementation on a case-by-case basis to allow for spiritual considerations and people concerns. The Elders should make every effort to prayerfully consider the risks of any modification to the recommendations.

## KidSafe Scope

KidSafe policy and procedures must be followed for all Westover Church Planned Events, both on campus and off campus.

Every minister, director, coordinator, Elder, deacon, paid church employee, and volunteer assigned in the areas of Children and Youth ministry is responsible for abiding by the provisions set forth in this policy for all Church Planned Events. This policy also applies to all paid Westover personnel whether or not they are specifically assigned to Children and Youth ministries. To achieve compliance with this policy, everyone involved with the Children must be familiar with this policy and agree to abide by the provisions set forth within this policy.



## Definitions

Terms used throughout this document are defined in the table below.

<i>Accident</i>	An unexpected and undesirable event resulting in damage or harm
<i>Adult</i>	A person 18 years of age or older
<i>Child / Children</i>	A person under the age of 18 years or still in High School
<i>Child Abuse</i>	Defined by state law, but generally includes [1] non-accidental physical injury, [2] sexual conduct or exploitation, [3] neglect, or [4] emotional distress
<i>Complaint</i>	An official or unofficial complaint raised by a Child or Parent to any Elder, Staff person, KidSafe Administrative Team member, or Youth Volunteer
<i>Church Planned Events</i>	Any classes, devotionals, activities, trips or other events that involve Children and are sponsored by Westover
<i>Elder</i>	A man holding the position of "Elder" at Westover
<i>Incident</i>	An occurrence or event that interrupts normal procedure or precipitates a crisis
<i>KidSafe Administrative Team</i>	The committee responsible for the implementation, refinement, and oversight of this policy
<i>KidSafe Interview Team</i>	The team along with other KidSafe certified adults who have received specialized training in the MinistrySafe interview process.
<i>KidSafe Policy</i>	The policies set forth in this document
<i>Member</i>	A person who officially places and maintains membership at Westover
<i>Parent</i>	A legal Parent and/or legal guardian of a Child
<i>Staff</i>	A member of Westover's staff, whether paid or unpaid
<i>Westover</i>	The Westover Hills Church of Christ located at 8332 Mesa Drive, in Austin, Texas
<i>Volunteer</i>	An individual who serves in a position at Westover that regularly requires them to be in contact with Children during a Church Planned Event
<i>Youth Volunteer</i>	Any member at Westover, who has completed the fifth (5 <sup>th</sup> ) grade up to age 18 (and still in High School)

## KidSafe Administrative Team

### Team Composition

The KidSafe Administrative Team is responsible for the implementation and oversight of this policy. The team should be composed of a diverse set of individuals, but kept small enough to function efficiently. The membership of the team should be approved by the Elders, and should report directly to the Elders.

- The team should include at least two Staff members who work with Children, and at least two non-Staff members.
- The team should include at least two males and at least two females.
- The team should avoid accepting members with conflicting interests.
- At least one member of the team should have some experience with child abuse matters including legal and procedural matters.
- The team will consist of a minimum of 5 individuals.



## Team Responsibilities

Team responsibilities include:

- Developing and refining the KidSafe policies and procedures
- Ensuring that policies and procedures are adhered to
- Ensuring that unapproved Volunteers are not serving in any ministry area with Children
- Working with the Elders to address policy and procedure violations
- Documenting policy and procedure violations
- Overseeing interviews done with prospective Volunteers as needed
- Overseeing the completion of background checks
- Making decisions on the denial of a Volunteer based on concern for the wellbeing of the ministries and Children being served
- Waiving the Six Months Rule on a case by case basis
- Notifying all Volunteer applicants of their selection or denial, including the reason for denial
- Maintaining a list of approved Volunteers and a MinistrySafe database
- Maintaining the confidentiality of the records
- Delegating other responsibilities as permitted by the Elders
- Providing KidSafe training classes to Middle School age Youth Volunteers
- Check references and review applications

Operating Guidelines:

- The team should have the latitude to develop and refine policies. All changes should be communicated to and approved by the Elders.
- The team should have the latitude to address moderate violations that will not result in the removal of KidSafe certification.
- The team should involve the Elders in any situation where removal of KidSafe certification might occur.
- The team should have the latitude to deny KidSafe certification to any prospective Volunteer. The team should be prepared to account to the Elders the reason(s) for the denial.
- Any member of the team should recuse himself or herself from direct involvement in an interview or policy violation investigation when there is a conflict of interest or close personal involvement
- The team will make decisions based on consensus.

## Volunteer Screening and Selection

All individuals will be afforded equal consideration when applying to work with Children in any capacity. However Westover believes that teaching and working with Children is a privilege and not a right. Protection of Children will supersede all other considerations.

To establish an equitable and safe, care-giving environment, a screening process will be conducted for all Volunteers who will be involved with Children during Church Planned Events.

### Adult Volunteer Eligibility and Screening

An applicant shall be eligible for selection as a Volunteer upon completion of the screening process and after the applicant has been a Member of Westover for at least six (6) months immediately prior to becoming a Volunteer. The six (6) months begins when the Westover Church office has documented that



the applicant has placed membership. The waiting period may be waived on a case-by-case basis at the reasonable discretion of the KidSafe Administrative Team.

In the prospective Volunteer screening and selection process, the Volunteer:

1. Sends a request to volunteer to [kidsafe@westover.org](mailto:kidsafe@westover.org)
2. Receives the guidelines and the necessary application forms;
3. Completes an application form, which includes references;
4. Gives permission for a criminal history check;
5. Successfully completes the online MinistrySafe training;
6. The KidSafe Team reserves the right to interview a prospective volunteer;
7. Signs all required paperwork, including a document indicating the Volunteer has received and understand the policy and by signing it agrees to work within the Policy guidelines; and
8. Obtains final approval from the KidSafe Administrative Team.
9. Emails the KidSafe team a photograph for a picture identification badge.
10. Upon completion of this process receives a badge identifying them as an Adult Volunteer.
11. Every 2 years, all volunteers will be required to complete a renewal process.

If at any point during this process the KidSafe Administrative Team determines that the individual does not meet the high standards required to work with Children at Westover, the individual will be respectfully notified and will not proceed any further with the process. Refusal to complete any portion of the process will result in the denial of KidSafe certification.

Any applicant not selected may, at their discretion, request a meeting with the KidSafe Administrative Team and/or the Elders of Westover to discuss the denial.

### **Youth Volunteer Eligibility and Screening**

Youth Volunteer applicants who have completed the 5<sup>th</sup> grade through the summer after their senior year in High School and are Westover Members are eligible to obtain KidSafe certification. The screening and selection procedure for Middle School students begins with the prospective Volunteer attending a KidSafe Administrative Team led training class. The content and format of the training class may change from time to time as reasonably determined by the KidSafe Administrative Team. The training class will involve the following activities:

1. A parent signed permission form allowing the child to attend the training
2. Watching and discussing a video on Child Abuse and protection
3. Receiving and reading a copy of the policy
4. Signing a Code of Conduct
5. Being photographed for a picture identification badge
6. Upon completion of the training receiving a badge identifying them as a Middle School Youth Volunteer

If a student completes the training once in middle school, they will not be required to renew their training until the summer before high school. Once a Youth Volunteer completes Middle School, they will be sent a link to the online MinistrySafe training and will be required to successfully complete that training to continue as an approved volunteer. Upon completion of that training, they will be given the opportunity to take a new photograph and will receive a new badge identifying them as a High School Youth Volunteer. If a High School student wishes to obtain KidSafe certification for the first time, they will need to follow the same guidelines as an adult volunteer, with the exception of an application and Criminal Background Check. They will be required to successfully complete that training to start as an approved volunteer. Every 2 years, High School volunteers will be required to complete a renewal process.



## Staff Screening

Westover Staff members go through a rigorous vetting process prior to being hired for their position. This process, however, does not remove the need for KidSafe training and certification. In addition to the Staff selection process, Staff members who will work with Children must do the following to obtain KidSafe certification. It is preferable that this be done before starting work at Westover.

1. Successfully complete the online MinistrySafe training;
2. Sign all required paperwork, including a document indicating you have received and understand the policy and by signing it agree to work within the Policy guidelines; and
3. Obtain final approval from the KidSafe Administrative Team.

## Babysitter Screening

Anytime there is a church sanctioned activity that requires babysitting, the babysitters must be KidSafe certified, and the guidelines in this KidSafe policy section must be followed.

## Criminal History & Child Abuse/Neglect Central Registry Checks

Each Adult Volunteer will undergo a criminal history check through an agency or web-site service authorized to do so by Texas law. This check will be conducted at the expense of Westover and will be treated as ***strictly confidential***. Information returned on this check will be available to the KidSafe Administrative Team only. Any applicant with a conviction for either Child Abuse or other physical crimes against a person cannot be engaged in any capacity that would bring them into contact with Children. Refusal to consent to the criminal history check will disqualify an applicant from obtaining KidSafe certification.

## Volunteer Criminal Background and Reference Checks

The KidSafe Administrative Team will oversee the completion of the criminal background checks and contact the references provided. At the discretion of the KidSafe Administrative Team, a personal interview may be conducted with the applicant. Once satisfactory checks have been completed, the prospective volunteer will be notified and sent a link to the on-line MinistrySafe training.

## MinistrySafe Training

Once the application form and background checks have been completed, each prospective volunteer will be entered into the MinistrySafe database. They will then receive an email with instructions on how to log into the MinistrySafe site to take the required online training. Upon successful completion of the training the KidSafe Administrative Team will be notified and a certificate will be issued. Special provisions will be available for those who are not able to access the internet. Refusal to complete the training or failure to receive a "passing" certificate will disqualify an applicant from being a KidSafe Certified volunteer.

## Volunteer Behavior Policy

### Heart of the Policy

Anyone who works with Children at Westover must comply with all KidSafe policies. There are two aspects to the policy: behaviors that are specifically described as inappropriate, and behaviors that are





not covered in the policy but may be deemed as inappropriate because they run counter to the heart of the policy. The heart of the policy says that Volunteers must exhibit good behavior in three areas:

- *Appropriateness* – Volunteers must show propriety in their contact with Children, whether physical, verbal, or written
- *Responsibility* – Volunteers must make responsible decisions when working with Children
- *Transparency* – Volunteers must be open and transparent about their contact with Children, such that other Volunteers and Parents are always aware of the contact

When quantifying what constitutes appropriate, responsible, and transparent behaviors, the policy identifies the following categories of negative behaviors that require a response from the KidSafe Administrative Team:

- *Serious violations* - Child abuse or serious infractions that will result in removal of KidSafe certification
- *Moderate violations* – Infractions that might not result in removal of KidSafe certification
- *Complaints* – Complaints brought by Parents, other adults, or Children
- *Poor Judgment* – Incidents where the volunteer exercises lack of judgment or responsibility regarding Children
- *Pattern of Incidents* – Scenarios where a Volunteer repeats the same unacceptable behavior or accrues multiple unacceptable behaviors, demonstrating a pattern of negative behavior.

Serious violations, or complaints of serious violations, result in immediate removal of the Volunteer from Children until a permanent decision can be made. Moderate violations, poor judgment, or complaints of the same may not result in immediate removal from Children. However, a pattern of incidents may.

### **Specific Behavior Guidelines**

#### ***Photo Identification Badge***

Once a Volunteer is approved to work with Children, the Volunteer will be issued a photo identification badge. The Volunteer will be required to wear a photo identification badge during all Church Planned Events when working with children through the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. For working with children 6<sup>th</sup> grade and above, the use of the photo identification badge will be encouraged but not required during all Church Planned Events. When required, if a Volunteer does not have his/her badge, a temporary badge will be assigned to that Volunteer for that event only. If the Volunteer has misplaced his/her badge a request must be made to the KidSafe Administrative Team for a new badge.

#### ***Two-Volunteer Rule***

Every attempt will be made to have two Volunteers with Children at all times during Church Planned Events. The “Two-Volunteer” rule prohibits one Volunteer from being in an isolated setting with a Child or group of Children without another Volunteer present. Compliance with this rule serves not only to protect the Child but also to protect the Volunteer against the possibility of false accusation. The spirit of this rule also applies to non face-to-face communications, such as electronic or written communication. Caveats to the two-Volunteer rule are:

- Husband and wife Volunteers are encouraged to participate in the same activity but will only count as one (1) Volunteer.
- Parent and Child Volunteers are encouraged to participate in the same activity but will only count



as one (1) Volunteer.

- Youth Volunteers under the age of sixteen (16) must have two (2) Adult Volunteers present during all Church Planned Events. Any Volunteer sixteen (16) through eighteen (18) can count as one (1) Volunteer, as long as they are not working in the High School ministry, but there must always be at least one Adult Volunteer close by for supervision and consultation if needed.
- Nursery Greeters in the nursery suite on Sundays during worship services and Bible class will suffice as the 2nd Adult Volunteer for any nursery classroom that may have only one Adult present, on rare occasions where this might be necessary. The top portion of the half-doors will be left open so that the rooms may be audibly and visibly monitored by the greeter. The greeter will make unannounced checks on all rooms throughout the services and classes. The greeter will be present for all diaper changes if only one Volunteer is present.

To facilitate the Two-Volunteer rule the following guidelines must be followed:

- The top portion of half-doors shall be left open when only one Volunteer is available. Full doors should be left open if there is not a half-door or window in the door or wall. No Papers or posters are to be hung on the windows next to the doors so that a line of sight will be maintained from the hallway.
- A Volunteer shall not visit in seclusion with a Child or take a Child away on a one-on-one basis. In activities where there is a legitimate reason or Parental consent has been given for being alone with a Child (for example pastoral counseling), the visitation must be conducted in a public place where there are other people nearby to observe the activity.
- In general Volunteers should avoid communications, either written or electronic, that are not disseminated to more than one Child. If this type of communication is necessary, there should always be another Adult informed that the communication took place. This includes any written or electronic communications, including but not limited to handwritten notes, email, text messaging, and social networking sites, between a Volunteer and a Child.
  - Any written or electronic communications sent to an individual Child may be seen as equivalent to seeking private time with a Child
  - Written or electronic communications used to disseminate information regarding specific events or schedule changes to an entire group of individuals, or to respond to individual inquires about events, schedules, date changes, etc., are considered appropriate
  - Birthday cards, thank you notes or other types of congratulatory messages are considered appropriate
  - If a child initiates written or electronic communication with a Volunteer that is beyond the scope of requesting information regarding events, schedules, etc., the Volunteer should, at a minimum, uphold the spirit of the “Two-Volunteer rule” by informing another Volunteer or Staff member that the communication took place and seek a more Transparent way of communicating with that Child.
- Two-Volunteer supervision must be maintained after Church Planned Events on or off campus until all Children are in the custody of the Parent or adult that brought them, or have left the event (for Children older than 5<sup>th</sup> grade).

### ***Inappropriate Contact***

Stating which behaviors are appropriate and which are inappropriate allows Volunteers to comfortably show positive affection in ministry, and yet identify individuals who are not maintaining safe boundaries with Children. The contact guidelines are based, in large part, on avoiding behaviors known to be used by child molesters to “groom” Children, Youth, and their Parents for future abuse. The contact guidelines are to be carefully followed by all Volunteers working around or with Children and Youth.



These guidelines include but are not limited to the following:

- Inappropriate or lengthy embraces
- Kisses on the mouth
- Holding Children over three years old on the lap
- Touching bottoms, chests or genital areas other than for appropriate diapering or toileting of infants and toddlers
- Showing affection in isolated areas such as bedrooms, closets, staff only areas or other private rooms
- Occupying a bed with a non-related Child or Youth
- Prolonged touching of knees or legs of Children or Youth
- Any type of massage given by a Child or Youth to an Adult
- Any type of massage given by an Adult to a Child or Youth
- Any form of unwanted affection
- Comments or compliments (spoken, written, or electronic) that relate to sexual development
- Snapping bras or giving “wedgies” or similar touch of underwear whether or not it is covered by other clothing
- Giving gifts or money to individual children or Youth without the knowledge of a Parent
- Private meals with individual Children or Youth without the knowledge of a Parent
- Swearing or using inappropriate language around Children or Youth
- Sharing of pornography with Children or Youth

Love and affection are part of church life and ministry. There are many ways to demonstrate affection while maintaining positive and safe boundaries with Children and Youth. Some positive and appropriate forms of affection are:

- Brief hugs.
- Shoulder-to-shoulder hugs
- Pats on the shoulder or back
- Handshakes
- “High-fives” and hand slapping
- Verbal praise
- Touching hands, faces, shoulders and arms of Children or Youth
- Arms around shoulders
- Holding hands while walking with small Children
- Sitting beside small Children
- Kneeling or bending down for hugs with small Children
- Holding hands during prayer
- Pats on the head when culturally appropriate (For example, this gesture should typically be avoided in some Asian communities)

## Monitoring and Reporting

It is the responsibility of each department/ministry to ensure that this KidSafe Policy is being followed. It is recommended that classes and events involving Children be monitored periodically by staff and/or other volunteers without advanced notice, to verify that two Volunteers are present at all times, badges are being worn when required and that all aspects of this policy are being enforced.

### Reporting Suspected Child Abuse

All Members are required by this policy and by the laws of the State of Texas to report known or



suspected abuse of Children or Youth to the police or to Child Protective Services. Failure to report suspected abuse of Children or Youth is a crime. Reports may be made confidentially or anonymously. Every state provides immunity from civil liability for persons required to report suspected abuse in good faith and without malice. Simply stated, "in good faith" means that the person submitting the report believes what he or she is reporting to be true.

In addition to reporting to the state authorities, Volunteers and Members are required to report any suspected or known abuse of Children or youth that may have been perpetrated by any Member or Volunteer of Westover directly to a KidSafe Administrative Team member or Westover Staff Member who will immediately report it to the KidSafe Administrative Team, so that immediate and proper steps may be taken.

The KidSafe Administrative Team and Westover will cooperate fully with any investigation by local and state authorities.

### **Reporting Inappropriate Behavior**

When Volunteers or Members observe any inappropriate behaviors, behaviors that are inconsistent with the Child Protection Policy and Procedures, or which may violate any provision of Child Protection Policy and Procedures, they must immediately report their observations to a KidSafe Administrative Team Member. Any person receiving a report of inappropriate behavior or possible violation of these policies shall inform the KidSafe Administrative Team immediately. All complaints or reports of inappropriate behavior or policy violations with Children or youth will be taken seriously. The KidSafe Team will make every effort to investigate the report by taking into account the perspectives of all parties involved.

### **Follow-Up to Behavior Issues**

The specific process performed during follow-up to reported behavior issues varies with the seriousness of the issue. In general, the process will adhere to the Biblical model of approaching a brother or sister in love. However, this approach may be modified if a Child may be in danger.

Whenever an incident arises that is more than a minor violation or minor lapse in judgment, the KidSafe Administrative Team will consult with the Elders regarding the issue. The Elders will determine if the behavior is a serious violation or not, or if the repetition of behavior constitutes a negative pattern of behavior. Upon that determination an appropriate response will be made.

### **Response to Moderate Violations**

For moderate violations or complaints of the same, a Biblical model may be fully maintained.

- After consulting with the rest of the KidSafe Administrative Team, one member of the KidSafe Administrative Team will meet with the Volunteer.
- If the complaint was brought by a third-party, the name of the third-party will be kept private.
- The KidSafe team member will explain the issue to the Volunteer, and ask that the behavior cease or not be repeated.
- The KidSafe team member will document the results of the meeting, including the response of the individual.
- If the Volunteer shows no responsibility for the behavior or no willingness to correct the behavior, the issue will be elevated to a serious violation.



## Response to Serious Violations, Patterns, and Compliance Refusal

For serious violations, patterns of violations, or refusal to comply with the policies, the first responsibility is to protect the Children and to protect Westover as a legal entity. If child abuse is suspected it **must** be reported immediately to the state authorities – no modification of policy may occur in that case.

- After consulting with the rest of the KidSafe Administrative Team, one Elder and one KidSafe team member will meet with the Volunteer as soon as possible.
- If the complaint was brought by a third-party, the name of the third-party will be kept private.
- The Elder will explain the issue to the Volunteer, and ask that the behavior cease or not be repeated.
- The Elder will instruct the Volunteer that they will be removed from contact with Children until the issue can be fully investigated.
- The KidSafe team member will document the results of the meeting, including the response of the individual.
- The behavior will be investigated by the Elders or their designees.
- If the behavior is determined to be child abuse, the KidSafe Administrative Team will contact Texas authorities as required by law, and KidSafe certification for the Volunteer will be revoked.
- If the behavior is determined to not be child abuse but otherwise serious, the KidSafe certification for the Volunteer will be revoked.
- If the behavior is determined to not be serious or not true, the Volunteer will be allowed to resume normal contact with Children.
- Any Elder or KidSafe Team Member should recues himself from the decision to remove a Volunteer from contact with Children, either short-term or long-term, when there is a conflict of interest or close personal involvement.

## Follow-up to Incidents of Child Abuse or Serious Violations

This Policy emphasizes prevention to safeguard our Children. However, in the unlikely event that an allegation, accusation, suspected child abuse, or seriously inappropriate behavior occurs, Westover is committed to a proactive stance in ministering to the victim and the victim's family, the accused, and the family of the accused as well as the congregation, as appropriate.

Follow-up may involve Elders and ministers in the development of a course of action which provides follow-through to the various individuals involved. The general approach will contain the following elements:

- The Elders will provide pastoral counsel and ministry to the emotional and spiritual needs of the victim and their family. This may include arrangements for professional therapy as required.
- Should investigation by authorities be required, the Elders will cooperate fully with any investigation and legal actions that may result.
- The Elders will provide pastoral counsel and ministry to the spiritual needs of the accused and their family. This may include arrangements for professional treatment and therapy as required.
- The Elders may act to impose spiritual discipline on individuals as a result of their investigations and the conclusions reached.
- The Elders will communicate with the congregation, as appropriate, respecting the privacy of the individuals involved.

