



TACOS Youth Safety Policy and Procedure

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TACOS- A middle school and high school outreach ministry program for all youth in the area that seeks to engender resilience in teens by equipping them to grow in and rely on their faith to better handle social issues.

Target Audience: Teens and families in the Sussex surrounding area. Church connection with CCOS

TACOS will strive to:

- Lead teens to grow in their faith
- Lead teens to learn and experience the connection of faith and service and caring for others
- Lead teens to integrate faith as a centrally defining principle of their lives that impacts their internal and external lives

Introduction

TACOS is an outreach ministry program that branches off of the Cooperating Churches of Sussex. TACOS offers a unique setting for teens to learn and grow in their faith through understanding the impact they can make through service in the community and actively acting on their faith.

All individuals are welcome to join and participate in TACOS. This program strives to ensure that every child knows that they are loved and are blessed by God to go and be the hands and feet of Christ in, not only this community, but the world.

Purpose

To help protect youth while participating in TACOS, this safety policy has been adopted. It is important that all TACOS paid staff, leaders, and volunteers understand and implement these guidelines to help prevent any harm towards youth in the program.

These procedures are designed to:

1. Provide a safe and secure environment for youth, adults, volunteers, visitors and staff.
2. Assist TACOS in evaluating a person's suitability to supervise, oversee, and/or exert control over the activities of children and youth.
3. Satisfy the concerns of parents/guardians and staff members with procedural steps.
4. Provide a system to appropriately respond to alleged victims of harmful acts and their families, as well as the alleged perpetrator
5. Reduce the possibility of false accusations made against volunteer and paid staff.

Personal Conduct

- Excessive displays of affection and/or inappropriate discussion during TACOS programming is prohibited.
- Personal/inappropriate relationships with youth are not allowed, and can be considered under the law a form of sexual abuse.
- Never engage in physical discipline of a minor. Leaders and volunteers shall not abuse minors in any way.
- Use or possession of tobacco products is not permitted.
- Use or possession of alcohol products is not permitted. Blood alcohol levels over .00 during TACOS programming is not permitted. Consumption of alcohol beverages by underage individuals and/or youth is grounds for dismissal from TACOS.
- Use or possession of illegal drugs is not permitted. Reasonable suspicion of possession or use of illicit drugs can result in an investigation by appropriate legal authorities.
- Volunteers and leaders are not to engage in unwitnessed, individual consultation with youth during TACOS programming.
- Use or possession of weapons or other dangerous materials is prohibited.
- All volunteers and leaders are expected to uphold these policies and to conduct themselves at all times, including personal time, on and off site as ambassadors of the ministry of TACOS.
- All volunteers and leaders will work to create a safe environment that focuses primarily on the youth's needs and interests rather than on other staff or themselves, speak and listen to youth in a manner that reflects a respect for each individual, including those with different backgrounds and abilities, create and support an environment that provides emotional safety, and guide group behavior in a developmentally appropriate manner.

Supervision Procedures

Unless an extenuating circumstance exists, TACOS:

1. Will screen all leaders and volunteers and approve those individuals in advance of TACOS programming.
2. Will have selected volunteers and leaders that will monitor facilities during events/activities involving minors. Also minors will be released only to a parent or guardian unless prior arrangements have been made. Verification through contact with a parent or guardian will be required under circumstances in which arrangements were not noted before the time of release.
3. Utilize a sign-in and sign-out sheet for TACOS programming indicating name and time of arrival and departure as well as a parent or guardian signature.

4. Watch surrounding areas upon arrival and departure times, including entrances, specifically Templeton Middle School walkway, to make sure youth arrive safely to TACOS. A leader or volunteer may be present and directing youth in the case of suspicious activity in surrounding areas upon arrival and departure times.
5. Bathroom Policy
 - Volunteers or leaders must not be alone with children in a closed stall.
 - Will require that young children be accompanied to the restroom and the volunteer or leader wait outside the restroom to escort the child back to the activity. Whenever possible, the escort will be the same sex as the minor.
 - For TACOS youth, children may be excused to use the restroom unattended.
6. Short of Staff Policy/ Two Adult Rule
 - Volunteers who will be unable to serve on a particular day must notify the TACOS Director and/or other volunteers in advance of the absence.
 - If only one volunteer or leader is present, due to an unexpected absence of another volunteer or leader, the volunteer leader must promptly notify the TACOS Director or other leaders who will help monitor programming with unannounced visits.
 - At least two leaders or volunteers must be present at all times.
 - Speaking with youth one on one should be in a public/group setting, and not in private, where the leader or volunteer is in sight of other people.
 - Supervision will increase as the larger group increases in participants of TACOS.
7. Guidelines for Physical Touch
 - Appropriate physical touch is done only in group settings
 - Any physical contact between youth and a leader or volunteer that would provide or is intended to provide any form of sexual gratification is strictly prohibited.
 - Limited physical contact such as a pat on the back, or on the head, or a handshake is permissible. Hugs are permissible within sight of others. It is strongly suggested to ask permission, however, before giving a hug. The volunteer or leader must avoid any prolonged hugs and must stop a hug immediately upon request.
 - Make certain your hugging meets the youth's needs and not your own.
 - Volunteers and leaders shall not abuse youth including but not limited to:
 - a. Physical abuse-e.g. strike, slap, spank, shake, punch
 - b. Verbal/Mental abuse-e.g. humiliate, degrade, threaten
 - c. Sexual abuse of any kind including inappropriate touching and exposure
8. Guidelines for Healthy Behavior Management
 - Before every activity, proper behavior will be discussed and consequences of breaking any rules will be addressed.

- Youth who commit infractions will be sensitized to the behavior with a verbal warning from a leader or volunteer.
- Youth who are disruptive should be taken out of the activity, within sight of other people. The leader or volunteer should explain to the youth that a particular behavior is unacceptable and remind the youth that if the behavior continues, the leader or volunteer will have to remove the youth from the activity.
- If the disruptive behavior persists, the parents should be notified of the disruptiveness and may need to talk with the TACOS Director about the behavior. In addition, an accident/incident report will be completed if a staff member needs to contact a parent.
- Reporting Procedure:
 - Any violations of this policy should be reported to the TACOS Director. Additionally, any leader or volunteer that has reason to be concerned about the safety or welfare of a child is expected to bring his or her concerns to the TACOS Director immediately.

9. Off-site and Overnight Policy

Event off-site/overnight must satisfy the following three requirements:

- The presence of at least two approved leader or volunteers.
- Parents will be informed about the agenda of the event, the address and telephone number of the place to which the youth will be going (when applicable) and the anticipated departure and return times.
- Written parental permission including a signed medical treatment form and emergency contacts must be obtained and returned prior to the event, for overnight events or when group transportation is provided.
- If the larger group was to separate at an off-site event, youth will be able to travel in groups of three or larger.

10. Driving or Transporting Youth

- All drivers must be over the age of 21, have a valid driver's license, current automobile insurance, and an updated MVR Driving History Search.
- Vehicles used in transportation must have enough seatbelts to safely secure every person in the vehicle. The leader or volunteer must make certain that everyone is safely buckled before departure.
 - Vehicles transporting youth and leaders that do not meet this policy will not be permitted to use for transportation.
- Leaders or volunteers who are driving must always obey all rules on the road including the established speed limit.
- When transporting youth in groups, parents are to be informed when they are leaving, how they will be traveling, when they expect to arrive at their destination, and when they will return.
- One leader or volunteer must be present in each vehicle.

Disqualification

No person may be entrusted with the care and supervision of minors or may directly oversee and/or exert control or oversight over minors who has been convicted of the offenses outlined below, been on a probated sentence or received deferred adjudication for any offense outlined below, or has presently pending any criminal charges for any offense outlined below until a determination of guilt or innocence has been made, including any person who is presently on deferred adjudication. The following offenses disqualify a person from care, supervision, control, or oversight of minors:

1. Any offense against minors as defined by state law.
2. A misdemeanor or felony offense as defined by state law that is classified as sexual assault, indecency with a minor or adult, assault of a minor or adult, injury to a minor or adult, abandoning or endangering a minor, sexual performance with a minor or adult, possession or promoting child pornography, enticing a minor, bigamy, incest, drug-related offenses, or family violence.
3. A prior criminal history of an offense against minors.

Response to Abuse

TACOS will respond promptly to investigate any accusation of abuse. All accusations of abuse will be taken seriously. It is important to be appropriately respectful to the needs and feelings of those who allege abuse and those who have been accused of abuse.

When an allegation is made involving abuse, the person reporting the complaint is to be told about the guidelines and the procedures to be followed. An investigation into the allegations will begin and the assistance of legal authorities may be necessary. The investigation may include:

1. Report the incident to the appropriate authorities in accordance with state law, if applicable.
2. Report the matter to COS's insurance carriers, if applicable.
3. Cooperate with authorities and insurance carrier.
4. TACOS may suspend the alleged offender while a confidential investigation is being conducted.
5. The TACOS Director will meet with the alleged perpetrator and notify him or her of the results of the investigation and recommendations for action.
6. The TACOS Director will meet with the alleged victim, along with his or her parents or guardians, and notify them of the results of the investigation and recommendations for actions.

Response to Sexual Abuse

TACOS will respond promptly to investigate any accusation of sexual abuse. All accusations of sexual abuse will be taken seriously. It is important to be appropriately respectful to the needs and feelings of those who allege sexual abuse and those who have been accused of sexual abuse.

When an allegation is made involving sexual abuse, the person reporting the complaint is to be told about the guidelines and the procedures to be followed. The TACOS Director or an appointed person will begin investigating the allegations and may use the assistance of legal counsel or other consultants. If the TACOS Director is the individual accused of sexual abuse, then the Director of Education and Youth Ministry will conduct the investigation. The investigation will be conducted as follows:

1. Report the incident to appropriate authorities in accordance with the state mandatory reporting laws.
2. Report the matter to COS insurance carrier.
3. Cooperate with authorities and the insurance carrier.
4. TACOS may suspend the alleged offender while a confidential investigation is being conducted.
5. An official of COS (and legal counsel or other consultants) will then meet with the governing body of TACOS and present a report on their investigation, which will include findings and recommendations of actions.
6. An official of TACOS will meet with the alleged perpetrator and notify him/her of the results of the investigation and recommendations for actions.
7. An official of TACOS will meet with the alleged victim, along with his/her parents or guardians, and notify them of the results of the investigation and recommendations for actions.
8. During the investigation, an official of TACOS shall maintain contact with the alleged victim and his/her parents or legal guardian, and inform them of the actions taken and assist them in their process of healing.
9. An official of TACOS (and legal counsel or other consultants) may meet with the alleged perpetrator, the alleged victim, and any others with knowledge of relevant facts.
10. Communicate with criminal and civil legal counsel.
11. Communicate with those affected by the ministry of the alleged perpetrator.
12. Hire a consultant or assign a spokesperson to respond to media or prepare a statement for the media if the need shall arise, subject to the approval of an attorney and or TACOS.

TACOS Youth Safety Policy and Procedure Acknowledgment

These guidelines have been designed to guide and assist you when working with minors. The information establishes general practices and guidelines and should not be construed in any way as a contract of employment, continued employment, or continued volunteer opportunities. TACOS reserves the right to make changes in the content or application of this program and to implement those changes with or without notice.

The terms defined herein are defined for the purposes of the program and do not suppose or establish a legal relationship. These terms are not defined for the purposes of creating a legal relationship with TACOS or any related or associated entity and instead are to be used with this document.

I have received a copy of the TACOS Youth Safety Policy and Procedures. I understand it is my responsibility to become familiar with and adhere to the information contained herein. I understand that these policies are the property of TACOS.

Print Name

Signature

Date