

## SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY

### NORTH TEXAS CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Effective January 1, 2008 - Adopted June 6, 2007

**BACKGROUND:** The General Conference of The United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child sexual abuse in the church. The General Conference of 2004 readopted the resolution. The resolution includes the following statement:

Jesus, said, "Whoever welcomes [a] child ...welcomes me" (Matthew 18:5). Children are our present and our future, our hope, our teachers, our inspiration. They are full participants in the life of the church and in the realm of God.

Jesus also said, "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 depths of the sea" (Matthew 18:6). Our Christian faith calls us to offer hospitality and protection to the little ones, the children. The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church state, "children must be protected from economic, physical, emotional and sexual exploitation and abuse" (§ 162C).

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children and youth. Child sexual abuse, exploitation, and ritual abuse occur in churches, large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural and racial lines. It is real, and it appears to be increasing. Most annual conferences can cite specific incidents of child sexual abuse and exploitation within churches. Virtually every congregation has among its members adult survivors of early sexual trauma. Such incidents are devastating to all involved: the child, the family, the local church and its leaders. Increasingly, churches are torn apart by the legal, emotional and monetary consequences of litigation following allegations of abuse.

God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children, youth and other vulnerable persons from sexual and ritual abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where children, youth and adults grow safe and strong. [From *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church-2004*, pp. 201-203. Copyright © 2004 by The United Methodist Publishing House.]

**LEGISLATION:** Be it resolved that the North Texas Annual Conference establish a Safe Sanctuary Policy for all Conference and District Events effective January 1, 2008.

Be it further resolved that a Safe Sanctuary Task Force be appointed for the purpose of establishing procedures for Safe Sanctuary Training and Certification for all staff and volunteer adult leaders of children and youth.

Be it further resolved that legislation be brought to the 2008 session of the North Texas Annual Conference requiring every local church to develop and implement a Safe Sanctuary Policy.



# **Safe Sanctuary Policy for All Conference and District Events**

## **North Texas Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church**

### **Introduction to Annual Conference Policy**

OUR CALLING AND OUR MANDATE IS TO ENSURE A SAFE SANCTUARY FOR GOD'S PEOPLE.

Throughout the gospels, Jesus provides teachings on providing a peaceable kingdom for all of God's people, including our most precious gifts, our children and youth (Matthew 5:9, Luke 18:15-17). The peaceable kingdom begins with sanctuary. Scriptures provide examples of how sanctuary is to be a community of protective nurture and harmony (Psalms 20:1-2, 27:4-5).

As Christians, we are called to create a safe sanctuary in our churches. They must be holy, safe and protective communities for all of God's children, regardless of age or ability. The purpose of this policy is to address the safety of our children and youth at all local churches, and at all District or Annual Conference sponsored events. The North Texas Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church recognizes the need to have a formal, written policy with procedures in place (1) to help prevent the opportunity for the occurrence and/or the appearance of abuse of children and youth, and (2) to help protect workers from false accusations and/or suspicions.

The following policy and procedures are not based on a lack of trust in workers, but are intended to protect our preschoolers, children, youth, workers, employees, volunteers and the entire church body. Careful and confidential documentation is essential to show compliance with policies, to verify information as needed, and to have an accurate record in the case of an incident.

### **Scope of Annual Conference Policy**

This policy and its provisions shall apply to all persons including all paid and unpaid leaders, whether lay or clergy who have any direct or indirect contact with children and youth who participate in any activities or events sponsored by the North Texas Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church and/or its Districts.

This Annual Conference policy is effective as of January 1, 2008 for all Conference and District Events. The North Texas Annual Conference policy shall be applicable at all Conference and District activities involving children and youth. Examples include, but are not limited to the following: Summer Camps, District/Conference Trips, Connect to the Kingdom (C2K), Confirmation Celebration, Mid-Winter Retreats, Youth Annual Conference, Conference and District Council on Youth Ministries meetings, and the School of Christian Mission.

The following examples may help distinguish between the application of the Annual Conference policy: a local congregation retreat or meeting taking place at Bridgeport Camp and Conference Center involves the congregation's policy, whereas a District or Conference retreat or meeting taking place at Bridgeport Camp and Conference Center involves the Annual Conference policy.

### **Supervision**

An adult is defined as anyone 18 years of age or older.

A youth assistant is anyone under the age of 18 who may work with children and youth only when supervised by at least two adults over the age of 18 years. Youth assistants cannot be in charge of, nor left alone with children and youth. Background checks on youth under the age of 18 are inaccessible, so choose youth with great care.

To achieve compliance with the Safe Sanctuary policy it may be necessary to combine groups; recruit, train, and reference additional volunteers; or cancel an event. Recognizing that there is safety in numbers, children and youth will be instructed to use the “buddy system.” It is also strongly encouraged that there be present at least one adult who is trained and certified in First Aid and CPR.

Observation of activities in rooms is essential, whether it is done by windows, open doors, glass doors, electronic technology, etc.

For all persons seeking to work with children and/or youth, they shall have at least 6 months membership in a local church or provide a written recommendation from the senior pastor at the church most previously attended.

Supervision for Nursery/childcare at Conference and District events:

- There shall be a minimum of two (2) adults per room or within line of sight.
- Whenever possible State Childcare Minimum Standards must be followed, particularly in relation to the number of adults to child ratio.

Supervision of children and youth at Conference and District events:

- Conference and District events shall observe the “2 Adult Rule” (2 adults per classroom, 2 adults within line of sight when outdoors.)
- Any one-to-one mentoring or consulting shall be conducted in sight of another adults.
- Understanding that there is safety in numbers, one adult can be in contact with multiple youth (6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade) so long as they are in line of sight of other adults.

### **Overnight Accommodations**

At events that require overnight accommodations:

- We strongly recommend that at least (2) adults are present in every room.
- When staying in a hotel, adults shall sleep in separate rooms from children/youth; or if necessary for children/youth to share a room with an adult, adults shall sleep in separate beds from children/youth so long as any one adult shall not be alone with any one child/youth.
- Recognizing accommodations may be restrictive in some cases (current South village cabins at Bridgeport Camp and Conference Center, for example) one adult is adequate, so long as any one adult shall NOT be alone with any one-child/youth.

### **Definitions of Abuse**

Verbal Abuse- Any verbal act that humiliates degrades or threatens any child or youth.

Physical Abuse – Any act of omission or an act that endangers a person’s physical or mental health. In the case of child or youth physical abuse, this definition includes any intentional physical injury caused by the individual’s caretaker. Physical abuse may result from punishment that is overly punitive or inappropriate to the individual’s age or condition. In addition, physical abuse may result from purposeful acts that pose serious danger to physical health of a child or youth.

Sexual Abuse – Child or youth sexual abuse is the sexual exploitation or use of same for satisfaction of sexual drives. This includes, but is not limited to: 1) incest, 2) rape, 3) prostitution, 4) romantic involvement with any participant, 5) any sexual intercourse, or sexual conduct with, or fondling of an individual enrolled as a child or youth in sponsored activities of this church, 6) sexualized behavior that communicates sexual interest and/or content. Examples are not limited to: displaying sexually suggestive visual materials, making sexual comments or innuendo about one’s own or

another person's body, touching another person's body, hair or clothing, touching or rubbing oneself in the presence of another person, kissing, and sexual intercourse.

**Emotional Abuse** – Exposing a youth or younger child to spoken and/or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty. Emotional abuse sends a message to the youth or child that she or he is worthless, bad, unloved, and undeserving of love and care. Emotional abuse may include being locked in closets or other confining spaces, being incessantly told they are bad, or being forced to abuse alcohol or illegal drugs.

**Neglect** – Endangering a child or teen's health, welfare, and/or safety through negligence. It may include withholding food, medical care, affection to destroy the child or teen's sense of self-esteem and self-worth.

**Ritual Abuse** – Abuse in which physical, sexual, or psychological violence is inflicted on a child or youth, intentionally and in a stylized way, by someone (or multiple people) with responsibility for the victim's welfare. Typically the perpetrator appeals to some higher authority or power to justify his or her abuse. Examples of ritual abuse may include cruel treatment of animals or repetitious threats of sexual or physical violence to the youth or child victim or to people related to the victim.

### **Screening for Adults**

Careful screening is one way to prevent the abuse of children and youth. Screening calls for a careful gathering and review of information in search of those who can provide safe and caring supervision in a safe environment. All screening shall be done in accordance with guidelines to be established by the Conference Safe Sanctuary Certification Task Force.

Persons having a criminal history of any of the following types of offenses shall not be allowed to serve in any ministry with children and youth:

- Child abuse, whether physical, emotional, sexual, or neglectful
- Violent offenses, including murder, rape, assault, domestic violence, etc
- Persons having a Criminal History of DUI or DWI conviction within the five (5) years immediately prior to application shall not be allowed to act as a driver.
- Persons having a Criminal History of a drug related conviction within the five (5) years immediately prior to application shall not be allowed to participate in the event.

### **Training**

The North Texas Annual Conference shall, through its Districts, develop and implement training and orientation procedures for all persons in leadership who work with children and youth at Conference or District activities and events. Training shall include but is not limited to this policy, appropriate discipline, appropriate physical and emotional boundaries, and leader misconduct as described in this policy. No person shall, after January 1, 2008, have any direct or indirect contact with children and/or youth until they have completed this training program. We recommend that at the beginning of each event a review of this policy be conducted.

The guidelines of these policies and procedures create a status of Safe Sanctuary Certification with the North Texas Annual Conference. Adults thus certified are entrusted with the title "Certified Annual Conference Safe Sanctuary Worker with Children and Youth".

### **Reporting of Incidents**

1. When an adult leader of an event or activity suspects that abuse or any suspected violation of the Texas Penal Code is taking or has taken place, he or she shall call 911 when needed and report the abuse to the appropriate local law enforcement agency and/or the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (800-252-5400). The adult leader shall

- contact the administrator or event leader immediately, and cooperate fully with the investigation conducted by law enforcement officials or child protective services.
2. Address any needs the child or youth may have, medical or otherwise. Report to the parent(s) and/or legal guardians(s).
  3. The person suspected of abuse (respondent) shall, for the safety and well being of the children or youth, be removed with dignity from further contact with the children and youth until an appropriate investigation has taken place. The matter shall remain confidential. If the adult event leader is the respondent, then the report should be made to that person's supervisor.
  4. Following the report of an incident, the adult event leader, or supervisor in charge shall document the report, and then speak with the alleged victim, being careful to use open-ended questions.
  5. All such conversations shall be documented. Careful and confidential documentation is essential. The documentation should include the following:
    - a The name of the adult leader observing or receiving the disclosure of abuse, including the date, time and place and any action taken by this person.
    - b The alleged victim's name, age, and date of birth.
    - c Any statement made by the alleged victim.
    - d Name of the respondent, the date, time and place of any conversation or any statement made by the respondent.
    - e Any action taken, i.e. suspension of the respondent.
    - f Date and time of call to the appropriate agency, name of worker spoken to, content of that conversation and case number assigned.
    - g Date and time of call to law enforcement agency, name of officer spoken to and content of that conversation.
    - h Date and time of any other contacts made regarding this incident.
  6. Notify the Conference/District authorities
  7. It shall be the goal to provide supportive care to both the victim and the respondent and to restore such persons to wholeness. 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.
  8. Confirmed reports of proven incidents of abuse shall be retained in a confidential file for future screening purposes.

### **Media Response**

The Bishop shall be informed of all investigations or allegations of abuse. If investigations or allegations of abuse should come to the attention of the media, a response shall come from Conference Communications Office or as designated by the Bishop. Refer all inquires to the spokesperson.

**Do not give out any information, simply state that all inquiries will be answered by our spokesperson.**

### **End of Adopted Policy**

## **OTHER INFORMATION**

### **Appropriate Discipline**

Children and youth should be made aware that appropriate behavior is expected at all events. Gentle reminders are always necessary when dealing with children and youth. When these reminders don't work, then discipline needs to move to the next step. In cases where behavior has to be addressed, designated event adults should handle it. In no case is physical discipline an appropriate measure to deal with problems. A reasonable response might include a period of "time out" for the child or youth. This should be done with necessary supervision keeping safe sanctuary guidelines in mind.

Keeping parents involved is important. They need to be kept up to date on their child's behavior. For serious offenses, the appropriate response will be to send the child or youth home immediately. Parents and the leaders will help make proper arrangements.

### **Appropriate Physical and Emotional Boundaries**

Physical boundaries are most important in dealing with children and youth. Persons working with children and youth have to understand and respect those boundaries. Obviously these boundaries change as children grow older. A young child sitting in the lap of a caregiver is most appropriate, whereas an older child or youth sitting in an adult's lap would not be acceptable. Hugs and kisses from a toddler to an adult are entirely different than the same from a youth.

Emotional boundaries are also important. As a child grows older it is important for the adult to maintain appropriate boundaries in relationships. It is important for those working with children and youth to not step outside of those lines and allow the younger person to become too attached to them. It is important for the older person to be careful where conversations might lead and to steer clear of inappropriate talk. When an adult recognizes that there might be an issue with these boundaries, great space should be allowed to come between them and the child or youth in question. If that does not solve the problem, then the event leadership should address the issue.

### **Leader Misconduct**

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

### **Spiritual Boundaries for Safe Sanctuary**

As we seek to lead young people in the development of their faith story, it is essential that we guide them and do not manipulate their emotions. This is especially true at longer youth/children's events. The attendees may be exhausted by longer and more active days than they are accustomed to and thereby more susceptible to emotional manipulation. It is therefore necessary that, as we present the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the opportunity to follow Jesus in a life-long journey, we present the invitation with "no-strings-attached." We must allow each person involved to make their own decisions without stigma, coercion, or pressure in any form. As we do this faithfully, we will see more fruitful commitments in the lives of all our participants.

For More Information on Safe Sanctuary Policies and Training contact:

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# **SAMPLE: Safe Sanctuary Policy for Local Church**

**Safe Sanctuary Policy for \_\_\_\_\_ United Methodist Church**

**\_\_\_\_\_ Annual Conference Effective \_\_\_\_\_**

## **SAMPLE**

### **Introduction**

Our calling and our mandate is to ensure a safe sanctuary for God's people.

Throughout the gospels, Jesus provides teachings on providing a peaceable kingdom for all of God's people, including our most precious gifts, our children and youth (Matthew 5:9, Luke 18:15-17). The peaceable kingdom begins with sanctuary.

Scriptures provide examples of how sanctuary is to be a community of protective nurture and harmony (Psalms 20:1-2, 27:4-5). As Christians, we are called to create a safe sanctuary in our churches. They must be holy, safe and protective communities for all of God's children, regardless of age or ability. The purpose of this policy is to address the safety of our children and youth at events sponsored by this church. This church recognizes the need to have a formal, written policy with procedures in place:

- to help prevent the opportunity for the occurrence and/or the appearance of abuse of children and youth, and
- to help protect workers from false accusations and/or suspicions.

The following policy and procedures are not based on a lack of trust in workers, but are intended to protect our preschoolers, children, youth, workers, employees, volunteers and the entire church body. Careful and confidential documentation is essential to show compliance with policies, to verify information as needed, and to have an accurate record in the case of an incident.

### **Scope of Policy**

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A youth assistant is anyone under the age of 18 who may work with children and youth only when supervised by at least two adults over the age of 18 years. Youth assistants cannot be in charge of, nor left alone with children and youth. Background checks on youth under the age of 18 are inaccessible, so choose youth with great care.

To achieve compliance with the Safe Sanctuary policy it may be necessary to combine groups; recruit, train, and reference additional volunteers; or cancel an event. Recognizing that there is safety in numbers, children and youth will be instructed to use the .buddy system.. It is also strongly encouraged that there be present at least one adult who is trained and certified in First Aid and CPR.

Observation of activities in rooms is essential, whether it is done by windows, open doors, glass doors, electronic technology, etc.

For all persons seeking to work with children and/or youth, you shall have at least 6 months membership in this church; or provide a written recommendation from the senior pastor at the church most previously attended; or provide a written recommendation from two current members of this church who have been members at least one year.

#### Supervision for Nursery/childcare

- There shall be a minimum of two (2) adults per room or within line of sight.
- Whenever possible State Childcare Minimum Standards must be followed, particularly in relation to the number of adults to child ratio.

#### Supervision of children and youth

- The .2 Adult Rule. shall be observed (2 adults per classroom, 2 adults within line of sight.)
- Any one-to-one mentoring or consulting shall be conducted in sight of another adult.
- Understanding that there is safety in numbers, one adult can be in contact with multiple youth (6<sup>th</sup>-12th grade) so long as they are in line of sight of other adults.

#### **Overnight Accommodations**

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- When staying in a hotel, adults shall sleep in separate rooms from children/youth; or if necessary for children/youth to share a room with an adult, adults shall sleep in separate beds from children/youth so long as any one adult shall not be alone with any one child/youth.
- Recognizing accommodations may be restrictive in some cases one adult is adequate, so long as any one adult shall NOT be alone with any one-child/youth.

#### **Definitions of Abuse**

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Sexual Abuse- Child or youth sexual abuse is the sexual exploitation or use of same for satisfaction of sexual drives. This includes, but is not limited to: 1) incest, 2) rape, 3) prostitution, 4) romantic involvement with any participant, 5) any sexual intercourse, or sexual conduct with, or fondling of an individual enrolled as a child or youth in sponsored activities of this church, 6) sexualized behavior that communicates sexual interest and/or content. Examples are not limited to: displaying sexually suggestive visual materials, making sexual comments or innuendo about one's own or another person's body, touching another person's body, hair or clothing, touching or rubbing oneself in the presence of another person, kissing, and sexual intercourse. (#6 taken from Resolution #30 Book of Resolutions 2000).

## **Screening for Adults**

Careful screening is one way to prevent the abuse of children and youth. Screening calls for a careful gathering and review of information in search of those who can provide safe and caring supervision in a safe environment.

- Prior to employment or acceptance as a paid or unpaid adult worker/volunteer, the event leader in charge of an event or program shall direct each prospective applicant to complete the application/consent form. By signing the form, the applicant gives permission to this church to contact references and perform the necessary investigation to complete the review of the application.
- This church is responsible for conducting at least two references and screening. This screening shall be done through the company with which the conference has contracted. All persons shall be screened annually.
- If any of the reports raise questions about fitness of the applicant, this church will disapprove the application. This church reserves the right to turn away any persons for service.
- If the applicant (paid or unpaid) is found to have been involved in any activity in which the applicant abused or exploited children or youth, the applicant will not be approved. Any conviction of a crime against children or youth shall disqualify any applicant.
- Results of screens shall be kept confidential. The determination of whether a particular crime is serious enough to result in this church giving a negative recommendation shall be made by this church in its sole discretion. Without in any way limiting those crimes which this church may determine to be serious, these are guidelines:

Persons having a criminal history of any of the following types of offenses shall not be allowed to serve in any ministry with children and youth:

- Child abuse, whether physical, emotional, sexual, or neglectful
- Violent offenses, including murder, rape, assault, domestic violence, etc
- Persons having a Criminal History of DUI or DWI conviction within the five (5) years immediately prior to application shall not be allowed to act as a driver.
- Persons having a Criminal History of a drug related conviction within the five (5) years immediately prior to application shall not be allowed to participate in the event.

## **Training**

This church shall develop and implement training and orientation procedures for all persons (including youth assistants) who work with children and youth. Training shall include this policy, and appropriate discipline, appropriate physical and emotional boundaries, and leader misconduct as described in this policy. No person shall, after this policy becomes effective, have any direct or indirect contact with children and/or youth until they have completed this training program. We recommend that at the beginning of each event a review of this policy be conducted.

The guidelines of these policies and procedures create a status of Safe Sanctuary Certification with this church. Adults thus certified are entrusted with the title .Certified Local Church Safe Sanctuary Worker with Children and Youth.

## Reporting of Incidents

- When an adult leader of an event or activity suspects that abuse or any suspected violation of the Texas Penal Code is taking or has taken place, he or she shall call 911 when needed and report the abuse to the appropriate local law enforcement agency and/or the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (800-252-5400). The adult leader shall contact the administrator or event leader immediately, and cooperate fully with the investigation conducted by law enforcement officials or child protective services.
- Address any needs the child or youth may have, medical or otherwise. Report to the parent(s) and/or legal guardians(s).
- The person suspected of abuse (respondent) shall, for the safety and well being of the children or youth, be removed with dignity from further contact with the children and youth until an appropriate investigation has taken place. The matter shall remain confidential. If the adult event leader is the respondent, then the report should be made to that person's supervisor.
- Following the report of an incident, the adult event leader, or supervisor in charge shall document the report, and then speak with the alleged victim, being careful to use open-ended questions.
- All such conversations shall be documented. Careful and confidential documentation is essential. The documentation should include the following:
  - ✓ The name of the adult leader observing or receiving the disclosure of abuse, including the date, time and place and any action taken by this person.
  - ✓ The alleged victim's name, age, and date of birth.
  - ✓ Any statement made by the alleged victim.
  - ✓ Name of the respondent, the date, time and place of any conversation or any statement made by the respondent.
  - ✓ Any action taken, i.e. suspension of the respondent.
  - ✓ Date and time of call to the appropriate agency, name of worker spoken to, content of that conversation and case number assigned.
  - ✓ Date and time of call to law enforcement agency, name of officer spoken to and content of that conversation.
  - ✓ Date and time of any other contacts made regarding this incident.
- Notify the Senior Pastor.
- It shall be the goal to provide supportive care to both the victim and the respondent and to restore such persons to wholeness. 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.
- Confirmed reports of proven incidents of abuse shall be retained in a confidential file for future screening purposes.

### **Media Response**

The Senior Pastor, District Superintendent Conference Treasurer, the PACT Service Center, Carrier and Bishop shall be informed of all investigations or allegations of abuse. If investigations or allegations of abuse should come to the attention of the media, a response shall come from a designated church spokesperson or a spokesperson in the Conference Communications Office or as designated by the Bishop. Refer all inquires to the spokesperson.

**Do not give out any information, simply state that all inquiries will be answered by our spokesperson.**

### **Appropriate Discipline**

Children and youth should be made aware that appropriate behavior is expected at all events. Gentle reminders are always necessary when dealing with children and youth. When these reminders don't work, then discipline needs to move to the next step. In cases where behavior has to be addressed, designated event adults should handle it. In no case is physical discipline an appropriate measure to deal with problems. A reasonable response might include a period of .time out. for the child or youth. This should be done with necessary supervision keeping safe sanctuary guidelines in mind.

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### **Leader Misconduct**

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### **Spiritual Boundaries for Safe Sanctuary**

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## **SUMMARY**

### **APPLICATION PROCESS**

All adults shall complete an application/consent form. By signing the form, the applicant gives permission to have references checked and background screening completed by the appropriate authority.

The application will be processed with all references checked and background screening completed by the company with which the conference has a contract.

All applicants must attend local church Safe Sanctuary training.

### **REPORTING OF INCIDENTS**

If an adult worker/volunteer observes or suspects a violation of the Safe Sanctuary policy, these steps must be taken immediately:

Address any immediate needs the child or youth may have,

Report concerns to Safe Sanctuary coordinator,

Cooperate with leadership and authorities throughout the crisis.

If an adult suspects that abuse or any suspected violation of the Texas Penal Code is taking or has taken place, he or she shall call 911 when needed and report the abuse to the appropriate local law enforcement agency and/or The Department of Protective and Regulatory Services. (800.252.5400)