

All items proposed in this memo were approved at the May 2024 meeting of the PNC-UCC Board of Directors.

May 7, 2024

TO: PNC-UCC Board of Directors
FROM: The Outdoor Ministries Committee (OMC)
RE: Safer Camp Policy, edition 2019-12-16 - Considerations for Summer 2024

The current Safer Camp Policy was adopted by the Pacific Northwest Conference of the United Church of Christ Board of Directors on 12/16/2019.

We recognize that, at its inception, this document was not a clean “camp-centered” document. It grew out of an attempt to create a policy that would address all conference-sponsored programs involving children and youth, including mission trips and Regional Youth Events. When this was deemed impractical, pieces evolved into the current policy.

As the OMC, our managing directors and our returning event directors (summer camps & youth retreats) have been intentionally working with the policy for the past 12 months, it has become evident that some of the requirements hinder, as opposed to support, faithful ministry in the outdoors. At the April OMC meeting, the following items were approved unanimously by those present and are presented here for your approval.

Reviewing and revising the entire policy is a major task, which we hope to take on in the next year or two. We feel the following items warrant attention now, as opposed to when a fully revised document is ready for presentation.

Current policy text is bold and in italic:

Item #1: *“Maintain ratios of at least those stated below, which pertain to each cabin/lodge in addition to camp participants as a whole:*

- *One Authorized Camp Leader per five children for grades K-5/ages 5-11,*
 - *One Authorized Camp Leader per six youth (grades 6-8/ages 11-14), and*
 - *One Authorized Camp Leader per seven youth (grades 9-12/ages 14-18)”*
- First, this statement lacks clarity. Does it refer only to those leaders interacting directly with the campers at a given time or everyone... event directors – when not around campers, managing directors, summer site staff whenever they are on site?
 - Second, these ratios are stricter than the ACA (American Camp Assn) standards which are recognized nationally and by our Insurance Board as the industry standards.
 - This policy creates more opportunities for us to be “out of compliance” for logical reasons throughout the day and night. For example: A family group of 12 intermediate campers is playing games in the meadow with two leaders. One leader takes 5 campers to the nurse for scheduled medications. The remaining leader has 7 campers with them. One sub-group is now in compliance, but the other is not. However, the size of each group is reasonable for the activities in which they are participating.
 - This standard puts an unnecessary burden on event directors to find more volunteers than are actually needed to provide appropriate supervision. It also reduces flexibility, and requires too much counting.

See next page for related ACA standards and recommendations.

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CURRENT PNC-UCC Safer Camp Policies

One Authorized Camp Leader per

For children Grades K-5 ages 5-11 = 1:5 (Kids Camp, Intermediate)

For youth Grades 6-8 ages 11-14 = 1:6 (Intermediate, Jr High, Sr High)

For youth Grades 9-12 ages 14-18 = 1:7 (Sr High)

ACA Standard:

ST.35.1 - Does the camp require and identify and/or advise rental groups to require and identify:

That ratios of staff who are on duty and supervising campers in units or living areas during unstructured time and in general camp activities should meet the following minimums?

Camper Age	Number Staff	Overnight Campers	Day-only Campers
5 years and younger	1	5	6
6-8 years	1	6	8
9-14 years	1	8	10
15-18 years	1	10	12

RECOMMENDATIONS

The chart below summarizes the information above.

Session	Grade Level	Ages	Current Ratios	ACA Standard	Recommended Minimum Ratios
You & Me (when parents have a break)	K - 4th	5-10	1:5	1:5/6 (ages split differently)	1:5
Kids Camp	2 nd - 4 th	6-10	1:5	1:6	1:6
Intermediate	5 th - 6 th	10-12	1:5	1:8	1:7
Jr High	7 th - 8 th	12-15	1:6/7	1:8/10 (ages split differently)	1:8
Sr High	10 th - 13 th	15-19	1:7	1:10	1:9

NOTE: Ratios would be stated as **MINIMUMS for direct camper supervision**, recognizing that a number of situations warrant lower ratios – camper with special needs or challenging behaviors, more challenging activities, weather, etc.

+ After summer 2024, Event Directors will be surveyed to see if/how the changes affected their work, both positive and negatively.

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Item #2: *“Be active and engaged in the community life of a PNCUCC member congregation for at least six months prior to each Outdoor Ministries program for which they are an Authorized Camp Leader.”*

- While good in concept, if we are looking for the best leaders for our campers, this seems too finite.
- We have had good event directors from related denominations who are active in their churches, but not the PNCUCC. We have had solid, faithful cabin leaders – as verified by their event directors and others – come from other states to serve with us.
- Many young adults are not “active and engaged” in their member congregation because of school, work and... life. Camp should not become “church” for these individuals, but it can be that piece of ministry that keeps them connected.
- What does active and engaged mean... for a young adult? Christmas & Easter? Monthly involvement?

Recommendation:

- All Authorized Leaders shall be faithful individuals and supportive of our mission, vision and camp goals.
- The majority of leaders for any event shall be active in their PNCUCC congregations.
- Exceptions for non-PNCUCC church members will be made on a case-by-case basis. For event directors (EDs), the determination of appropriateness is to be made by the managing directors (MDs) in consultation with the OMC. In the case of cabin leaders and resource people, the determination is to be made by the EDs and MDs in consultations with each other.

Item #3: *“Be at least 18 years of age and be at least five years older than the oldest youth they are supervising, and serve... “*

- The ACA standard for minimum age is 16. However, there are many other pieces in our policies related to minors, so it seems simpler to stay with 18 for this summer or until there is time to fully consider all the pieces together.
- We have been unable to find the original source of the “five years older” standard. While this might be a goal, in practice, it is impractical and overly burdensome.
- ACA Standard: *“All staff members are at least sixteen (16) years of age and at least two (2) years older than the minors with whom they are working.”*
- The *SafeConduct™ Policy & Procedure Template* ©Insurance Board, June 2017 edition does not list specific ratios or ages. It does suggest consideration based on the circumstances.

Recommendation:

- **Authorized Leaders must be at least 18 years of age and be at least three years older than the oldest youth they are supervising.**

+ Our hope is to see how this change affects programming and review it again after the summer.

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Item #4: “Authorized Camp Leaders shall not use the Shower House, while children and youth shall not use the shower facilities in Stillwater Lodge.”

- There is much discussion in the Praesidium Academy (UCCIB supported) training videos about the growing concern of 1) camper-on-camper abuse, 2) older campers mixing with younger campers in unintentional ways. For example, at the shower house or at the waterfront.
- We are striving to provide safe space for all campers and leaders, and to be especially aware of the needs of campers who may be non-binary.
- By current privacy standards, the shower house at N-Sid-Sen is acceptable, but not optimal. The shower stalls have curtain closures, as opposed to doors, and there are gaps under the stall walls. Many camps that are building new shower house facilities are opting for designs that have a closed-door room for each shower and each toilet (similar to those in Spirit Lodge).
- The shower and restroom facilities in Stillwater provide safer alternative in some situations. For example, there is an almost single-use toilet-shower facility which provides one of the safest showering options in camp.

Recommendation:

- **Put this standard on hold for one year.**

+ During the “hold” year, the MD and EDs at N-Sid-Sen will develop systems that work for the specific age group in camp.

Item #5: *There’s no policy for this one, but there is a tradition at N-Sid-Sen, that cabin leaders supervise the shower house from outside the entry door... with the door closed. The idea behind this was to protect the campers from inappropriate leader behavior.*

- Due to the desire to have two leaders supervising in all enclosed areas and the size of shower house entryway, this does make sense on one level.
- Praesidium video highlight shower houses / bathrooms as one of the highest risk areas for abuse in camp.
- The walls of the shower house are solid, and even though there are windows, it is really not possible to hear what is going on inside... if a perpetrator is being quiet.
- The *SafeConduct™ Policy & Procedure Template* ©Insurance Board, June 2017 edition
“While the youths shower, at least one staff member should stand in the bathroom doorway and within earshot of the youths.”

Recommendation:

- **Adopt the SafeConduct standard listed above, but allow for standing inside if standing in the doorway is allowing too many bugs to enter.**

+ This is another standard that will be slated for ongoing review of the situation with further recommendations to come.

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Item #6: “Invite participants to request housing and use bathrooms and other spaces that correspond to their gender identity.”

- How do we do this effectively, especially considering housing and bathroom facilities at N-Sid-Sen? Partial accommodations are made, but fully living into this is the challenge.

Recommendation:

- **Put this standard on hold for one year.**

+ During that time the OMC will dig into this standard and develop plans and policies.

Item #7: “Social networking policy:

On all social networking sites and platforms, including but not limited to Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, instant messaging, etc., no Authorized Camp Leader shall send a friend request to any child or youth. If a child or youth sends a friend request to an Authorized Camp Leader, it is up to the discretion of the Authorized Camp Leader whether or not they accept the request.”

- The *SafeConduct™ Policy & Procedure Template* ©Insurance Board, June 2017 edition
“Any private electronic communication between staff and youths, including the use of social networking websites like - Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, instant messaging, texting, etc. - is prohibited. All communication between staff and youths must be transparent.”
- We recognize that there can be some fuzzy lines, especially when campers and leaders come from the same church and have long-term relationships prior to camp – family friend, babysitter, etc. However...

Recommendation:

- Related to out-of-camp connections and communication between authorized leaders and campers, a leader-camper relationship shall not progress beyond the initial home/church relationship.

Example #1 - If Leader A babysat for Camper 2 prior to attending camp, it is acceptable for that activity to continue after camp.

Example #2 – If an authorized leader receives a new Facebook friend request from a camper, the request shall not be accepted, as it goes beyond the pre-existing relationship.

- Delete the highlighted section above.
- Add: Friend requests shall not be accepted from any campers who are minors.

+ We recognize that there may be special circumstances about regarding communication – not “friending.” For example, if a camper is reaching out due to trauma. These situations should be dealt with on a case-by-case basis in tandem with the MDs.

Item #8: “One-time partial day or substitute volunteers shall be chosen for a specific event by the Program/Event Director(s) in consultation with the camp Managing Director, who shall have veto power. They shall complete as many of the above requirements as possible and shall not be alone with children and/or youth.”

Recommendation:

- Delete section highlighted above.
- Add: At a minimum, partial day or substitute volunteers shall have a current, completed Criminal Background Check.