

## SAFETY AND RISK MANAGEMENT

In the book *Lord of the Rings*, Bilbo says to his nephew, “It’s a dangerous business, Frodo, going out of your door.” That is true in almost every other place, not just in Middle Earth. We take risks every day as we walk, drive, work, play, and spend time with our family and friends. Youth ministry brings its own risks and traveling with youth brings even more.

You can never get rid of risks entirely. Our hope is that this resource can help you identify risks ahead of time and choose how you will manage them well. There are some risks you will avoid, others where you can mitigate or minimize the risk, and others where you will take them cautiously as you care for young people and adults in your group.

### Preparing for the Gathering

There are a few things you can do to manage risks before you leave your door.

- Understand what is covered or not covered by your church’s insurance policy and what additional coverage you may need to take out. Be sure to consider coverage on vehicles while traveling.
- Perform background checks on all Adult Leaders. The LCMS Youth Gathering performs background checks on anyone 21 and over who is a volunteer planner, Ambassador, Young Adult Volunteer, or Team Flex.
- Have Adult Leaders take child safety training and meet with them together to discuss policies and procedures your church has in place to keep children and teens safe.
  - Currently the LCMS is working with [MinistrySafe](https://ministrysafe.com/lcms/) to provide free access to their training. This is a platform where you can send free training specifically about youth ministry to all your Adult Leaders. The Primary Adult Leader or someone from your congregation can also send paperwork and perform background checks from this site. More information can be found at <https://ministrysafe.com/lcms/>.
  - Adult Leaders should also know and understand their congregations’ guidelines on a variety of issues from common, like what to do in adverse weather or managing medication, to those we hope never occur, like physical or sexual abuse. Training can include topics like how to manage texting and social media connections, not being alone with a minor in a private location, and an understanding of what to do if a youth reports abuse, if a youth is injured, or if a youth has a mental health crisis.
- Discuss with parents any safety concerns they might have and plan for how you will communicate quickly and efficiently if something goes wrong on the trip.
- Be familiar with the resources that will be available for you at the Gathering including First Aid, Gathering Volunteers, Care Team, and Crisis Team.
- Designate one Adult Leader who will carry a basic first aid kit.



## **Safety at the Gathering**

Some of your group may be experienced travelers, while others will be new to being in a different city. It can be helpful for everyone to review how to travel safely no matter where you are going. Remember that Gathering staff and planners are working with the city and facilities behind the scenes to make the event as safe as possible.

- As you travel around the city, please maintain groups of at least three or four, with an Adult Leader. Never travel alone!
- Follow suggested walking routes and know where you are headed before you leave. Refer to your hotel Gathering Ambassador for routes. Do not wander into areas that are dark or void of people. Be aware at all times and keep your eyes up and off your phone.
- Always wear the wristbands provided by the Gathering. Security staff are trained to look for these wristbands to determine who is a part of our event and who is not.
- It's natural that participants will want to show Jesus's mercy to homeless residents of New Orleans. We recommend that participants give no cash or possessions to the homeless or panhandlers. The Gathering may have servant events that support residents of New Orleans who are struggling with homelessness.
- Carry your purse close to your body and your wallet in your front pocket. Make sure pockets on backpacks are closed or zipped.
- Hydration (drinking water), light-colored clothing, a balanced diet, and sleep are the best prevention for heat exhaustion and dehydration. Be prepared with appropriate footwear since there will be a lot of walking between program elements and to and from the hotel.
- Try to leave all valuable possessions at home if possible. Secure valuable possessions or money when leaving the hotel room. Only bring necessities with you and avoid wearing and carrying expensive items. Do not leave any valuables or backpacks unattended. When you do have to take out your wallet or purse, try to keep it discreet and do not let people see any cash. Be cautious when using an outdoor ATM.
- If you see something, say something! Be on the lookout for people doing things out of the ordinary such as entering prohibited areas or creating conflicts. Report any suspicious activity right away to the nearest Ambassador, security staff, or law enforcement. You can also call the Gathering HelpLine or in an emergency, 911.
- Watch out for each other, care for each other, and have the servant heart and mind of Jesus when it comes to how you treat all people.
- Before entering any Gathering event, have a realistic plan of where your group is headed. Both the Guidebook and the App will have maps of the facilities. Designate a pre-arranged meeting spot for members in case someone becomes separated from your group. (Remember, phones get lost, and batteries die.) Gathering "Info Booths" at both facilities can be a helpful place to connect.



- Maintain a physical list of cell phone numbers for the members of the group. Program an Adult Leader's cell phone number and the Gathering HelpLine number on all cell phones. Some adults create images for the front screen with the Primary Adult Leader's cell phone in case it is lost or in an emergency.
- Remind youth not to give their names and contact details to strangers or to place their usernames out in public view. It is important that they meet new people, but be wary of friend requests or messages from people they do not know.
- Each Gathering participant should bring photo identification and a completed Gathering Medical Release and Liability Waiver. Each participant should always carry a photo ID and a copy of these forms. A designated Adult Leader should also carry a copy of each group member's forms.
- If information on a participants Medical Release and Liability Waiver indicates, or at the suggestion of parents/participants, have a plan to access clinics, pharmacies, and hospitals. The HelpLine is another resource for this information. While they may not be needed, chronic conditions can flair and a new environment can change how an injury affects someone.
- Random searches of all backpacks, bags, containers, purses, etc., may take place at entry areas and other designated areas in the Convention Center and the Superdome. Security personnel reserve the right to question and search participants and their personal effects when suspicious activity is observed. Any items left unattended in the Convention Center and Superdome will be confiscated for participant safety.
- Lasers, fireworks, and weapons of any type are not permitted at Gathering activities and will be confiscated. Do not joke about weapons, violent acts, or terrorism.

The LCMS Youth Gathering works with local and state police and city officials to ensure the appropriate steps are taken to keep all participants safe. We also have safety team members working alongside Gathering Volunteers who are focused on every location where the Gathering has programming to ensure every participant has a healthy, safe, and incredible experience. Please listen to the directions given by police, security, safety team, and volunteers. Also, please feel free to share information with them or with the HelpLine if you see something you believe to be unsafe for our participants.

By working together, we can manage risks in order to give all Gathering participants a wonderful experience in New Orleans in 2025.

