



## THINKING ABOUT RISK MANAGEMENT

Everything we do throughout our day has a little bit of risk to it. As an adult leader at the Gathering, it's important to think through the risks involved so that you can manage them and are prepared before an event takes place.

### Adult Leaders

It's a good idea to surround yourself with other adult leaders that can make good decisions. Make sure you have enough adults and that your Adult Leaders are able to communicate well and work together. It is important to spend time as an adult leader team in advance. Talk through the expectations of leaders. It may seem like a lot but talk through what you might do in case of an injury or other emergency. Talking it through in advance helps everyone to contribute to providing the safest possible environment. Finally, make sure you always have an adult who is getting enough sleep. It might rotate, but when adults don't get a lot of sleep, it makes it harder to make good decisions.

We also can't stress enough the importance of background checks for all adult volunteers and staff in your church. LCMS has contracts with [AAIM](#) and [Protect My Ministry](#). You can connect to them through the [LCMS.org](#) webpage or use another reputable company that you can find to help you do the background checks and even train volunteers.

### Preparation

Be familiar with the risk management policies for your congregation. These are designed to help care for the congregation, each other, and as a witness to the world. Follow these policies in all your planning and if none are in place, have conversations with key leaders (parents, pastors, staff, members, etc.) so that many voices are a part of the risk management conversation.

Likewise, be sure you know what your policy covers in your church's insurance. Someone in your congregational leadership may know or you can contact your agent directly. They are usually eager to work with you to help understand your coverage and even help with the training of your volunteers.

It is a good idea to be prepared with first aid kits and check them for supplies before you need to use them. Restock used resources and make sure that items are replaced when past their usage date. Having your forms organized and on hand will help minimize risk. Depending on where you are going, some forms you might want to include are: "Permission for a Minor to Travel with You", "Permission



for Medical and Dental Treatment”, and “Permission for Dispensing Medication” and a “Video and Media Release” if you are going to take pictures.

Both youth and adult leaders need to agree on and hold each other accountable to appropriate behavior. If youth are struggling with boundaries or parts of your covenant designed to keep them safe, don’t simply repeat the rules and punish. Bring youth into the conversations about what might be too risky and why. This helps them to see how they can contribute to a safe and healthy trip for everyone. You can also include these conversations in the meetings before events and trips to establish your expectations with them.

If you have time and ability, you may want to look for Mental Health First Aid training or other program like it for all people who work with children and youth. This is a one-day training available in many areas to help adults that are working with teenagers be able to recognize signs of potential mental health issues.

## Traveling

Anytime you plan to leave the Church premises, there is a risk involved. Whether a quick trip in your community or a long-distance trip, those really require a lot of thinking through what could possibly happen and doing your due diligence in your planning. Vehicles break down, buses overheat, and planes get delayed or canceled. As you make your travel plans, don’t forget to consider how you can think through critical questions.

- What is the plan if the vehicle you are traveling in, breaks down? Who is available to assist you, if you have problems with your vehicle(s)?
- Do you have enough drivers, and can they get adequate rest to be safe on the road?
- What are the restrictions on your flights if they need to be changed? How can you make sure that your group stays together and if they can’t how will you make decisions to get everyone home?

## Additional Events

Lots of groups will choose to do additional experiences on their way to and back from the Gathering. While you might have lots of options, it’s important to be sure you manage these events just like you would any other programming back home. Anytime you are choosing to do something with your teens, it’s important to constantly assess the risks that are involved. Ask questions about who or what might be at risk.

- What people could be at risk in this event? For example, consider if all your students know how to swim before you decide on a day at the beach.
- What financial, property or reputational risks might you be taking?



- What might be consequences for this event in the future? Sometimes a spontaneous idea seems great in the moment, but in hindsight you may regret how it impacted parents' trust in you or how the students remember the Gathering in general.
- Are you honoring your congregation's policies and reputation?

## If Something Happens

Best plans can go out the window, so always have a Plan B in case something goes wrong. Then you'll have thought it through before it needs to be put in place.

Have an "Incident Report" form so that when an incident happens, you have a written document that is filled out right away so the details will not be forgotten. The form can be simple but needs to include: What happened, who saw it, and what was done in response to the incident. It is best to note even the simplest of incidents so that you have a record of it. And it is best to call parents and warn them about minor medical issues that happened, so they know you care and that they aren't surprised when they get a text or phone call from their teen.

We know that difficult things may happen at home while you are at the Gathering or someone may experience an injury or crisis while you are at the Gathering. While we pray this won't be the case, it's important to have a plan for how you will communicate with parents and with congregational leadership if necessary. Adult leader teams can talk about ways to support each other and their teens through these times. Please check out our other resources as well as the podcast for more information on how to handle crisis at the Gathering.

Risk management isn't about preventing all risk. It's about thinking through all the possibilities in our broken world and caring for others so they can focus on hearing the sharing the Gospel. While this can seem like just a focus on worst case scenarios, it's important to train and talk with adults and teens so that they understand how to help you manage risk. In the end we know that youth ministry is always a risk but so are other ministries of the church.

We pray for a safe, healthy, and Christ-centered event for all. As we do, we also hope this helps you think through risk and helps you manage it better as you prepare for the Gathering.