



BELONG

DISABILITY MINISTRY

BELONG PARTICIPANT HANDBOOK

The Belong Disability Ministry (Belong) is a ministry of Highland Park United Methodist Church (HPUMC) and has been serving the disability community in and around the Park Cities for more than two decades. Belong is looking forward to expanding our programming to meet the needs of our participants and families. The policies in this handbook are designed to ensure that participants and their loved ones know what to expect at Belong and what information is necessary for Belong staff to plan safe and comfortable programming for all participants. Changes may be made from time to time in the policies and procedures contained in this handbook without prior written or oral notice.

Belong takes its responsibility to participants and families seriously and hopes to formalize current best practices by consolidating all our policies in one place, ensuring that Belong staff, participants, families, and volunteers follow a consistent process. Policies are essential to ensure that safety procedures are followed and to guarantee that only background-checked individuals with proper training are present during programming that is not open to the public. We believe that families and participants have the right to know what to expect and who will be present during programming.

Many of our participants have independence goals, which may be undermined by a lack of communicated expectations. Another purpose of this handbook is to help support self-advocacy and independence in participants when appropriate. Not all participants can reasonably comply with specific policies. In such cases, Belong will offer additional support, collaborate with the participant's family or home support, or require a Participant Support to attend programming with the participant. The process by which these determinations are made is outlined below for greater clarity to our participants and their families.

Please note that the policies in this handbook are to set participant, family, and Participant Support expectations, and the majority are in place in the event of an emergency or to prevent a scenario that we are aware could occur due to external training from experts working with various organizations.

If you have questions or concerns about policies in this handbook or have suggested policies you believe should be reviewed by HPUMC Risk Management, please contact the Director of Belong Disability Ministry.

[Updated Fall 2025]

WHO MAY PARTICIPATE IN BELONG

Belong Participants

- Individuals with any type of disability are eligible to participate in Belong Disability Ministry programs after enrolling in Belong. However, no enrollment is required to attend The Feast, HPUMC's inclusive weekly worship service.
- Belong staff will determine who is accepted for enrollment into, and able to remain a part of, Belong programming as a participant.
- Participants of Belong are not required to be members of HPUMC or attend church services. Participants of all faith backgrounds are welcome.
 - Participants can expect most Belong programming to incorporate Christian components, such as an opening prayer, service projects, or tie-ins to biblical stories.
- Belong Disability Ministry strives to foster an inclusive church environment within HPUMC by providing environments conducive to community, belonging, and growth in one's personal walk with Christ.
 - We recognize that belonging and community can take different forms for each individual and/or family, and we strive to support each person in their chosen environment to the best of our ability.
 - Belong is happy to have conversations with participants and their loved ones about increased involvement in HPUMC programs, such as Kids Ministry, childcare, Youth Ministry, and Adult Small Groups.
- Participants may only attend programming open to their age group.
 - If a participant exceeds the age limit for a program, Belong staff will contact that participant and their family or support system at home to review other programs available to their age group.
 - When needed, Belong staff will work with a participant transitioning between age groups to ensure they are comfortable and have the necessary support in place.
- Chance's Cafe also employs some participants. Chance's Crew members who are working at Chance's will follow policies for employees while they are on shift. The policies in this manual apply to participants who are also Crew members when they finish their shift at Chance's or are participating in other Belong programming.

Family Members

- Family members are encouraged to attend Belong's public events, worship at The Feast, and enroll as volunteers to support Belong programming. Belong understands the importance of family to our participants, and Belong staff love getting to know everyone's favorite people.
- When needed, a family member may act as a Participant Support for their loved one at private Belong programming after meeting the requirements outlined below.

Friends, Guests, and Other Visitors

- Friends, guests, and visitors attending Belong programming not open to the public are required to check in at the front desk or with Belong staff and wear a name tag.

- Customers at Chance's Cafe and those at HPUMC are not required to check in or wear name tags for The Feast or other worship services, as these are public programs.
- Tours of the Tolleson Center or HPUMC Mockingbird Campus, either during or after Belong programming, may only be given by HPUMC staff.
- Program tours or the opportunity for prospective participants to sit in on a program prior to enrollment may only occur with the express permission of Belong staff.

Volunteers

- Belong is blessed by the support of trained volunteers who have a passion for serving the disability community.
- All volunteers must abide by the HPUMC and Belong Volunteer Serving Policies and follow all steps to enroll as a volunteer and renew eligibility to volunteer as laid out by HPUMC leadership with support from the Belong Volunteer Coordinator.

ENROLLMENT AND DISCLOSURES POLICY

Enrollment Procedure

- Every new participant will fill out the Belong Disability Ministry Participant Application.
- Participants and their families are responsible during the enrollment process for communicating the participant's needs and strategies for mitigating behaviors.
- Participants must update their enrollment annually using the Belong Disability Ministry Participant Application to ensure Belong has accurate and up-to-date information about each participant.
- Failure to report during enrollment known behavioral challenges or previous instances of interpersonal violence may result in a participant being unable to attend Belong programming independently.
- A phone call will be made to every new participant enrolled, clarifying any issues noted on the form and relaying our policy regarding dysregulated behaviors.
 - If the new participant is an adult, the call will be held with the participant and their guardians, parents, emergency contacts, and/or caregivers (depending on the participant), if possible.
 - If the new participant is a child, the call will be held with the child's parents or guardians.
 - In certain circumstances and with the permission of the participant's parents or guardians, Belong can consult with a behavior specialist or other support from school or another program who knows the participant and their needs well.

Required Disclosures

Families and guardians of adult participants are responsible for affirmatively disclosing:

- Any medical conditions that may impact emergency response protocol, including diabetes, a history of seizures, allergies, recent hospitalizations, or asthma
- Any conditions that may impact staffing or volunteer needs, including medications, toileting support needs, or a history of elopement (running away, darting outside)

- If an adult participant is under guardianship and cannot make certain decisions independently
- If an adult participant should not be allowed to attempt specific tasks or programs independently

Belong is committed to ensuring the safety of all participants and will use this information to determine programming and staffing decisions that support the unique needs of each participant.

In some cases, where a participant's behavior or medical needs exceed the capabilities of Belong staff and volunteers to manage safely, the participant will be required to have a Participant Support accompany them at all times during Belong programming. This determination will be made by Belong leadership during the enrollment process.

Belong programs are often staffed mainly by volunteers who are not certified for crisis intervention. In very rare cases, Belong may determine that a prospective or current participant cannot safely attend programming, even with a Participant Support, due to program constraints and our duty to ensure the safety of other participants. In these cases, a written explanation of why this determination was made will be shared with the participant's family and with HPUMC Risk Management.

Participation Policies

Participants With Special Medical or Personal Care Needs

- If a participant has specialized nursing needs such as feeding, medication, wound care, or equipment management, a Participant Support must attend Belong programming that does not have a nurse onsite and/or lasts fewer than three hours. If this requirement would disqualify a participant from attending due to a lack of access or means, please notify Belong staff, and we will attempt to schedule a nurse for the program.
- For programs lasting three hours or longer:
 - A licensed nurse or assistant nurse will administer medications, provide wound care, or handle specialized equipment.
 - A licensed nurse, assistant nurse, or occupational therapist will assist with feeding procedures.
 - Belong programming will include nurse, staff, or volunteer plans to ensure that personal care assistance with toileting or specific hygiene tasks can be provided to participants.
- If needed during a shorter program, Belong staff can offer some personal care assistance, a clean change of clothes, or other support. The participant's emergency contact will be notified in the event of this occurrence.

Medical Episodes and Emergencies

- In case of a medical episode or emergency, Belong staff will notify the participant's emergency contacts.
- If a participant is injured during Belong programming, Belong will file an injury report and notify the participant's emergency contacts. The participant or their parent or guardian may request a copy of the report.

- If there is a serious injury, prolonged seizure, or loss of consciousness, Belong staff will call 911.
- If a participant experiences a seizure during Belong programming, Belong's policy follows the guidelines of The Epilepsy Foundation's Seizure First Aid, prioritizing the safety and well-being of the individual experiencing the seizure.
 - Belong staff or onsite nursing support will follow a standard procedure for responding to a seizure, unless informed of other medical conditions or history that would alter the response. An example of this would be a seizure in a participant known to have diabetes.
 - Parents or guardians of participants with a known history of seizures are highly encouraged to submit a Seizure Action Plan, allowing Belong to best support the participant and communicate with their family.

Participants With Recent Hospitalization or Illness From Communicable Disease

- Any participant or Participant Support present for Belong programming must be free from signs and symptoms of communicable diseases and have been fever-free for 24 hours prior to programming without the use of fever-reducing medications.
- If a participant has recently been hospitalized and may require extra support at programming they do not typically need, we encourage any additional needs or considerations to be communicated to Belong staff so that programming adjustments can be made in advance. Belong staff are happy to give participants information about program plans in advance to support planning ahead for safe attendance.

Volunteer and Participant Support Screening, Training, and Enrollment Requirements

The purpose and intent of the policies in this section are to ensure that any adult present for private Belong programming, as opposed to public programs or events, is known to the Belong staff, has undergone appropriate background checks, and is trained to support safety goals, including MinistrySafe requirements. These requirements are issued by the Horizon Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church, and compliance with them is a condition of operation for all programming by HPUMC. Belong is required to uphold these rules in order to hold programs.

- Any adult person who remains with participants during Belong programming must enroll either as a Belong volunteer or a Participant Support and meet all background check, MinistrySafe certification, and training requirements. There is no cost to complete these steps.
- A Participant Support can include a variety of professionals to support a participant, including behavioral, medical, or personal care support. A family member or other individual without specific licensing or qualifications may also provide these supports. This work may be paid or unpaid.
 - A participant with no diagnosis or other documented need for medical, behavior, or personal care support may not attend with a Participant Support.
 - Participants who use a staffing service to provide paid caregivers may provide information about the staffing service to Belong's Operations Coordinator, who can certify with HPUMC that the screening and training for that service meet the requirements outlined above.

- A participant may be required to attend Belong programs with a Participant Support if their behavioral, medical, or personal care needs outpace what Belong is able to provide. A participant may also be required to attend programs with a Participant Support due to violations of the behavior policies outlined below. If a Participant Support has not met the requirements for attendance at private Belong programming, neither the participant nor the Participant Support may come to programs not open to the public.
- In some cases, with the express permission of a Belong staff member, a parent or guardian may attend a program with a potential Belong participant to assess whether Belong is a good fit and/or to determine if the participant requires external support within Belong programming.
 - In these cases, the parent or guardian will remain at all times with an assigned Belong staff member and will not be in the same room as any participants (Belong's program spaces have many ways to observe programming).
- These requirements do not apply to Belong programming where parents, caregivers, and family members are invited to join participants as part of the programming or at a public Belong or HPUMC event.
- Anyone may interact with Chance's Crew members as customers while they are working at Chance's Cafe.

Registration, Sign-In, Name Tags

- If advance registration for a program is required, any participants who have not signed up ahead of time will be sent home to ensure that participation numbers do not exceed staff and volunteer capacity.
 - For participants who may struggle to navigate online registration, Belong staff will give the option to register over the phone or by email.
 - Depending on the participant's capacity and their home supports, Belong staff may agree to call the participant before programming to ask if they would like to register.
- Adult participants, who are able, are responsible for signing in upon arrival for a Belong program. When a participant is unable to independently sign in upon arrival, Belong staff will plan accordingly to ensure the participant's arrival is recorded and they are given a name tag.
- All staff, participants, volunteers, or Participant Supports remaining for programming outside of Sunday programming must wear a name tag at all times to support Belong's participant safety procedures.
- If certain clothing, such as a program t-shirt or uniforms/aprons, is required for participation in a Belong program, participants and their families should notify Belong staff if a participant is unable to wear the required attire. In some cases, wearing matching, identifiable clothing is part of our safety protocol. Belong staff will work with participants to make sure they are comfortable.

Designated Program Areas

- Participants will remain in designated program areas at all times, including before and after the program.

- Only HPUMC security officers and authorized HPUMC staff are permitted in the Belong staff administrative suite or behind the Tolleson security desk.
 - Chance's Crew members are allowed in the Belong staff administrative suite when they are on shift.
 - When invited for a meeting in a Belong staff office, a participant or their family member or guardian may enter the administrative suite.
- Only Chance's management, the Chance's Crew, Chance's volunteers, and HPUMC staff are allowed in the Chance's Cafe areas, including behind the counters, in the kitchen or supply rooms, or in the Chance's training room.
 - Other volunteers, participants, HPUMC members, or external partners may only enter those areas with permission from a member of HPUMC staff.
- No participant, family member, or Participant Support may use Tolleson classrooms; the Movement, Sensory, or Art Rooms; HPUMC spaces not open to the public; or the equipment and supplies in those rooms outside of regular programming.
- Belong staff and Tolleson security will be responsible for locking doors to areas where participants are not permitted and for keeping doors to the administrative suite and security desk area closed to promote participant adherence to policies.
- When a parent or guardian remains on HPUMC grounds during a program, but is not participating in programming with a participant as a Participant Support, Belong staff will designate a comfortable waiting area separate from the programming area, where the parent or guardian will be seated.
 - If the Chance's Cafe seating area or the Resource Room (fish tank room) are not being used for programming, these will be the default designated areas for parents or guardians.
- If Belong programming requires crossing Hillcrest Avenue to get between HPUMC spaces, participants should wait to be accompanied by Belong staff or a volunteer before crossing.
- When Belong programming occurs off HPUMC's campus, participants and Participant Supports will follow instructions regarding the appropriate use of space and safety guidelines provided by Belong staff and volunteers.
- On the rare occasions Belong programming involves group transportation, participation waivers must be received. Participants are expected to enter and exit the vehicle safely and to remain in their seats while in transit. Belong will support participants who may struggle with this expectation by assigning a staff member or volunteer to accompany them.

Photos and Social Media

- Participant Supports attending Belong's regular, private programming are prohibited from taking and/or posting pictures on social media that include Belong participants. This is to ensure that the dignity and privacy of our participants are respected when they attend programs to learn, grow in faith, and try new things.
 - Examples of such programs include Night OWLS, Day Classes, Explorers, The Walk, and rehearsals for Spotlight programs.

- Participant Supports may take photos at public Belong events such as Spotlight red carpets, parties, or special events.
- Parents or guardians attending events or programming as volunteers must follow the HPUMC Serving Policies and refrain from taking or posting photos while volunteering.
- Certain Belong or HPUMC staff may take photos during both public and private programming. These photos will only be used in accordance with HPUMC's photo and media waiver, which participants or their guardians sign during enrollment.
 - HPUMC will refrain from using any photos of participants who have not agreed to the waiver.
 - HPUMC staff will never post photos to personal social media accounts unless they are sharing or reposting official HPUMC or Belong social media posts.

Participant Use of Personal Technological Devices

- Many Belong participants rely on personal devices such as cell phones, tablets, or assistive communication devices. In some cases, these are essential tools for participants to express themselves. In other cases, applications or music may help a participant moderate their emotions or stimulation.
- Participants may use personal electronic devices during Belong programming to support their participation.
- Belong staff may request that a participant use headphones if the noise from a device is unnecessarily disruptive. Belong staff may request that a participant refrain from distracting other participants from programming with their device.
- Participants may take pictures and communicate appropriately with each other using messaging or social media applications during Belong programming, unless the timing of device use disrupts the program.
 - A participant may lose the right to use their cell phone during Belong programming if its use is consistently disruptive and not for a communication or therapeutic purpose.
 - This right may also be lost if a participant uses their phone in a manner that embarrasses or harasses another participant.
 - A participant may not take or post a photo of another participant without their consent, even if the other participant has not explicitly requested that they not do so.

HPUMC Animal Policy

- Only service animals are permitted to attend Belong Disability Ministry events or programs with a participant, Participant Support, or family member. This includes both public and private programs.
- "Service animals are defined as dogs that are individually trained to do work or perform tasks for people with disabilities. Examples of such work or tasks include guiding people who are blind, alerting people who are deaf, pulling a wheelchair, alerting and protecting a person who is having a seizure, reminding a person with mental illness to take prescribed medications, calming a person with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) during an anxiety attack, or performing other duties. Service animals are working

animals, not pets. The work or task a dog has been trained to provide must be directly related to the person's disability. Dogs whose sole function is to provide comfort or emotional support do not qualify as service animals under the ADA." (source: ada.gov)

Self-Release From Adult (18+) Programs

Belong is committed to ensuring safety while promoting each participant's individual independence goals. We understand that some things that are helpful to some participants can undermine strategies for success for others.

- Belong will operate under the assumption that adults attending programming can self-release unless the adult's parent or guardian submits a Program Release Plan request.
- "Self-release" means that when a program concludes, adult participants will not be monitored for behaviors or safety risks. Staff will not assist with booking rides, tracking the participant's ride progress, or escorting the participant to the correct vehicle.
- Participants who self-release will be expected to leave Belong programming space. Participants can wait in the Chance's Cafe seating area, the HPUMC front desk area, or the Tolleson lobby area.
- Participants who self-release are not permitted to continue using HPUMC or Belong equipment or to remain in areas outside of designated waiting areas. Participants who self-release and subsequently violate these policies will be permanently barred from self-release.
- Belong staff are happy to work with participants and their families to create an appropriate Program Release Plan based on a participant's support needs.
- In cases where a participant's support needs during release exceed the capacity of Belong staff, Belong may require a parent, guardian, or caregiver to meet a staff member in the Tolleson lobby to assist the participant with the transition from programming.

PUBLIC DISPLAYS OF AFFECTION BETWEEN PARTICIPANTS

Belong staff and volunteers foster a sense of community and belonging among all participants. Romantic relationships and public displays of affection (PDA) among peers are a natural outcome of belonging and community. It is helpful for Belong staff to understand when participants are in a relationship with other participants so we can ensure that personal boundaries are being respected. This is because participants may have different understandings of their relationships.

Confirmation of Relationship and Comfort Level

If Belong staff notice or are notified that two participants are engaging in public displays of affection, staff will individually ask each participant if they are comfortable with PDA and feel empowered to communicate boundaries with the other participant. If one of the participants tends to struggle with communication or self-advocacy, Belong will request their family or home support to weigh in. Staff will notify participants' families or home supports if it seems they have formed a relationship at Belong.

Belong Support for Participants in Relationships

To continue to foster a healthy understanding of social norms and appropriate displays of affection, Belong staff and volunteers will support participants and couples in the following ways:

- Regularly offering healthy relationship classes through the Day Classes Program
- Clearly and consistently reminding participants of why they are at Belong programming (e.g., “Now is not the time for that; we are here to [take a class, attend worship or Sunday School, rehearse at Spotlight, etc.]”)
- If a volunteer notices public displays of affection that do not comply with this section of the participant handbook, they will call upon a member of Belong staff to support intervention.

Public Displays of Affection Not Allowed at Belong Programming

- During Belong programs, staff will address a couple or an individual directly with a private verbal cue to immediately discontinue any inappropriate PDA or other sexualized behavior, including:
 - Language around sexual activity
 - Language that sexually objectifies others’ bodies
 - Backrubs, piggyback rides, lap sitting, or any intentional, consensual* touching of areas of the body typically covered by someone in shorts and a t-shirt (outside of a hug or side hug)
 - Making out, lingering kisses, or refusing to release a hug
 - Engagement in a conversation together during programming that results in the disruption of programming or the distraction of other participants
- If a verbal redirection related to PDA was issued during programming, Belong staff will invite each participant involved in the conversation to discuss why the behavior was not appropriate (or, more specifically, not appropriate at Belong).
 - The emergency contact of each participant involved will be notified about Belong’s plans to have this conversation and will be invited to attend.
 - Belong staff will follow internal documentation procedures to ensure the wants of participants and the guidance of their loved ones are respected.
- These behavior standards apply to everyone at Belong: HPUMC staff, volunteers, participants, and family members.
- Due to its nature as an employer, Chance’s management and Chance’s volunteers will clearly and consistently uphold standards of professionalism. Any form of PDA between employees and/or Crew Members during working hours is not allowed. Policies around this will be communicated clearly by Chance’s management to Crew Members.

*Touching of areas of the body covered by someone in shorts and a t-shirt that is not consensual will fall under Belong’s “Participant Harmful Behavior Policies and Procedures,” found below.

Acceptable Types of PDA and Times for PDA at Belong

- If participants engage in PDA during non-programmatic times (e.g., transition from class to class, waiting for a program to begin), Belong staff will not intervene unless a behavior plan or other agreement with the participant or their parent or guardian is in place and requires intervention.
- Examples of acceptable PDA include:
 - Peck on the lips or cheek
 - Hugs of greeting
 - Holding hands

When PDA Becomes a Problem

- If Belong staff become aware that PDA is not welcome by a participant, either from another specific participant or from any other participant, then staff will assist the participant in communicating their boundaries to others.
- Failure to respect boundaries may fall under Belong's "Participant Harmful Behavior Policies and Procedures" or "Repeated Highly Disruptive or Harmful Behavior Policy."
- If a couple or individual is not responsive to a verbal redirect of unacceptable PDA, Belong staff will follow the steps outlined in the "Repeated Highly Disruptive or Harmful Behavior Policy."

Therapeutic/De-escalation Appropriate Touch

- As part of our participant enrollment process, Belong will work with participants and their families to identify best practices that ensure participants can be successful across various environments.
- At times, Belong is directed by a participant's parents or guardians that a gentle backrub or back-scratching can help calm a participant who is becoming overstimulated or overwhelmed, thereby preventing distress or harmful behaviors.
- In these cases, Belong will confirm this direction in writing with the participant's parent or guardian. Only Belong staff or specially trained volunteers will ever receive direction to engage in this kind of touching, which otherwise is strictly prohibited by HPUMC and Belong policies.
- Under no circumstances will Belong staff or volunteers engage in prohibited touch at the invitation of a participant without prior consent from their parent or guardian and an understanding of the specific therapeutic purpose.

PARTICIPANT HARMFUL BEHAVIOR POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Activation, Escalation, Flooding, Overstimulation Procedure

If a participant appears activated, escalated, flooded, and/or overstimulated and begins ignoring staff or volunteer instructions in ways that may jeopardize their own safety or the safety of others, Belong staff should be called if none are present.

Belong staff will decide whether the participant can or should be removed from the space to a quieter area with fewer opportunities to act out or harm others, or whether other participants should be removed from the space if they could be in harm's way. Two non-participant adults will remain with any isolated participant at all times.

Physical Harm to Self

If a participant is harming themselves in a manner that is likely to cause bruising, draw blood, or endanger their head, a verbal cue to discontinue the behavior, followed by alternative options to regulate, will be provided by the volunteer or staff present.

- If no HPUMC/Belong staff are present, the volunteer will radio for the program coordinator.
- If the behavior continues and is disruptive or upsetting to other participants, the room will be cleared of all other participants.
- If the threat of harm is from an object or equipment, Belong staff will attempt to remove the implement safely. This may include one staff member hugging the participant from behind to restrict movement as another staff member confiscates the object. Parents or guardians have the right to notify Belong staff that a participant should never be restrained under any circumstances, even if harming themselves.
- If the behavior persists for five or more minutes or escalates further, the participant's emergency contact will be called. Belong staff may attempt to stop or slow the behavior by restricting movement, including hugging the participant from behind if it is safe to do so and would not result in prolonged restraint.
- Belong staff will endeavor to safely redirect the participant to a space with fewer opportunities for serious self-harm and where better regulation can occur.
- In case of a more serious injury, Belong staff will immediately contact emergency services, followed by the participant's emergency contact.
- The volunteers and/or staff present for the incident will complete the Belong incident form to ensure good communication with the participant's parents or guardians and the best support for the participant at future Belong programming.
- Belong staff will complete the required HPUMC Risk Management incident reporting steps, if necessary.

Physical Harm to Another Participant

If a participant harms another participant, the participant exhibiting the harmful behavior will receive a verbal cue from the staff or volunteer present to discontinue the behavior and to step away from the other participant.

- If no HPUMC/Belong staff are present, a volunteer will immediately radio for the program coordinator.
- The participant who exhibited the harmful behavior will be asked to leave the space and given the option to de-escalate and re-regulate in another room. At least two non-participant adults will accompany the participant to the alternate space.

- The emergency contacts of the participants involved will be contacted.
 - The emergency contact of the participant who caused harm to another will be asked to come and pick up the participant.
- If they are unable to do so, the participant who harmed another will be given an alternative activity to complete independently in a separate space, supported by at least two volunteers or staff.
- The participant who was harmed will be checked on by HPUMC/Belong staff and given the option to leave the room to regulate and process in a quiet space.
 - They will also be asked if they would like to go home.
 - If they would like to go home, that will be communicated to their emergency contact.
- The volunteers and/or staff present for the incident will complete the Belong incident form. This ensures good communication with the participants' parents or guardians and the best support for those participants involved in future Belong programming.
- If a participant harms another participant in a manner likely to cause bruising, draw blood, or endanger the head, the participant exhibiting the harmful behavior will no longer be allowed to attend Belong programming independently; a Participant Support must participate with them. Returning to independent attendance will be determined by Belong's staff.
- Belong staff will complete the required HPUMC Risk Management Accident Report.

Physical Harm To Program Support

If a participant harms a Belong volunteer, contractor, or member of HPUMC/Belong staff during a Belong program, a verbal warning will be given to discontinue the behavior.

- The participant will be given the option to de-escalate and re-regulate in another quiet space.
- If the participant can stop the behavior within a few minutes and regulate their behavior, they will be able to stay in the program.
- If the participant is unable to stop and regulate their behavior with a verbal cue or a sensory break within five minutes, their emergency contact or parents or guardians will be notified to pick them up. The participant will wait for their pickup in a separate space, accompanied by two staff members or volunteers.
- The volunteer(s) and/or staff involved will fill out Belong's incident form when the program day is finished.
- Belong staff will complete the required HPUMC Risk Management Accident Report.

Addressing Minor, Yet Problematic, Behavior Patterns

- In some cases, Belong staff or volunteers may identify a pattern of behavior that is not physically harmful or highly disruptive but should still be addressed because it makes others uncomfortable and may impact their experience at Belong.

- The goal of this type of intervention is to prevent the behavior from becoming habituated or escalating into a behavior that may impact the participant's ability to attend programming independently.
- Identifying and addressing these patterns will occur in partnership with the participant's family or support at home, so Belong staff can assess to what extent the participant is aware of the behavior and can redirect it.
- In no case will a participant who is unable to identify and redirect behavior be held to an inappropriate standard and expected to do more than they are able. If it is not reasonable to expect the participant to redirect their own behavior, Belong staff may assess the participant's need for a Participant Support at programming to help promote successful participation and engagement at Belong.
- Belong staff will meet with the participant and, if appropriate, their family or home support to create a plan to address the behavior. The plan will include action items for the participant, Belong staff, and sometimes the participant's family or home support.
- Examples of this kind of behavior include making repeated inappropriate innuendos, regularly using offensive language, encouraging other participants to break rules, repeatedly leaving programming without a valid reason, and ignoring safety instructions that the participant is able to understand and follow.

USE OF RESTRAINT AT BELONG

Definition and Policy

“Restraint” is defined in Texas education law as “the use of physical force or a mechanical device to significantly restrict the free movement of all or a portion of a student’s body.” This can involve picking up a child participant to prevent them from running out the door to the street, or having two adults hold the hands of a participant to prevent them from running to an unsafe environment. It can also look like keeping a participant in a stroller when they can walk to prevent them from running into harm’s way.

At Belong, restraint will only be used to prevent harm to participants. Under no circumstances will restraint be used to force a participant to follow program steps, require engagement in an activity, or cease a behavior that is disruptive but not dangerous to themselves or other participants. Belong will communicate clearly with families when restraint is used.

- If a participant requires restraint to participate safely in a program, Belong staff will immediately notify that participant's parents or guardians and seek written guidance on how the participant's behavior can be safely managed to establish expectations. This may appear as permission for volunteers or Belong staff to hold hands with the participant against their will during transitions between activities or spaces at Belong, or guidance to keep the participant in a stroller until they are in the program space.
- Under no circumstances will any type of full-body restraint, where a staff member or volunteer completely immobilizes a participant, be deployed at Belong as a technique to manage high behavior. This would involve tackling or using a staff member's or a volunteer's full body to immobilize arms and legs.

- If a participant has an object and is self-harming or threatening self-harm, staff may restrain arm movement from behind and attempt to remove the object if possible to do so safely.
- In circumstances where a participant is either in grave danger or poses a grave danger to others, HPUMC security or other emergency services may be required for support and may use restraint in accordance with their training and procedures.
- If Belong staff are unable to manage a participant's risky behavior, even when using restraint techniques authorized by their family, the participant's parents or guardians will be notified that the program cannot safely accommodate the participant's needs. The participant will be required to attend future Belong programming with a Participant Support to ensure their safe participation.
- If a participant is unable or unwilling to remain in designated program spaces and consistently attempts to flee to unsafe areas, such as outside the building or into unmonitored areas of the building, they will be required to attend with a Participant Support.
- In rare cases, attendance with a Participant Support does not manage behavior that endangers the participant or other participants, a participant and their parents or guardians may be notified that they cannot participate in Belong programs any longer.

REPEATEDLY HIGHLY DISRUPTIVE OR HARMFUL BEHAVIOR POLICY

Belong has a small staff supported by wonderful, dedicated volunteers. Our primary goal is to ensure the safety and comfort of all participants in Belong programming. We recognize that numerous external factors influence behavior and an individual's ability to regulate, and we strive to support our participants effectively, regardless of their location. In cases where a participant is unable to avoid highly disruptive or harmful behaviors at Belong, our staff will follow the procedure outlined below to ensure everyone's safety and to prioritize the well-being of all participants, while exploring safe options for the individual to continue attending.

Definitions

Highly Disruptive Behavior includes speech, sounds, and/or actions that cause multiple people present to be uncomfortable and/or afraid. These behaviors can be sexually inappropriate, promote or threaten violence, or prevent programming from being carried out as planned by Belong or HPUMC.

Harmful Behavior includes hitting, throwing something sharp or heavy, kicking, spitting, shoving, inappropriate touching, unwanted touching after a command to refrain from touching, and failure to respect personal space for a prolonged period after a request to do so.

Policy

If a participant is unable to redirect highly disruptive or harmful behavior either twice during the same Belong program or during two consecutive program attendances, Belong staff will file an incident report and notify the participant's parents or guardians.

From that point forward, the participant will be required to attend programming with a Participant Support. Belong staff will complete the required HPUMC Risk Management incident reporting steps, if necessary.

Certain severe behaviors will result in a participant being required to attend all future Belong programming with a Participant Support after just one incident. These behaviors include:

- Physically harming another participant
- Causing serious injury to a volunteer, contractor, staff member, or themselves
- Inappropriate touching
- Significant damage to furniture, equipment, tools, or the program space
- Throwing heavy, hard, or large objects
- Elopement (running away) from a program's designated area to an unsafe or inappropriate area that takes more than one staff or volunteer to return to
- Intentional and highly offensive verbal harassment or threats of serious harm

In these cases, no prior redirection or warning from the injured party or Belong staff is necessary.

If a participant is no longer allowed to attend programming independently, they may be required to notify Belong staff in advance each time they plan to attend. This allows staff to prepare appropriately, including arranging any necessary separation from participants when the individual may have harmed or threatened, and to ensure a safe and supportive environment for the participant during their attendance with a Participant Support. Our primary goal is to continue serving all participants in a safe environment where each is set up for individual success.

Belong staff will file an incident report and share it with the participant and their parents or guardians. The report will include clearly outlined next steps and expectations for future participation. When appropriate, this may include a plan for a gradual reduction of support—such as phasing out the requirement for a Participant Support to attend—based on the participant consistently meeting goals for safe and appropriate behavior.

HARMFUL BEHAVIOR AT BELONG RESPITE PROGRAMS

In some cases, a participant's behavior may impact a family's access to Belong's respite programs. These programs are primarily staffed by volunteers, and Belong's primary goal is the safety of all participants. In cases where even multiple volunteers being assigned to care for a participant cannot contain behaviors that place either the participant or other participants in harm's way, their family will be notified that Belong cannot accommodate that participant at respite programming.

Belong volunteers and staff will use the Belong Incident Report process to document clearly where these situations may occur, and Belong will strive to work with families to prevent harmful behaviors by developing an understanding of how to set participants up for success.

All parts of this handbook apply to respite programs. Some behaviors may result in a participant and their family temporarily or permanently losing access to programming in order to ensure the safety of other participants.

Should this happen, Belong is committed to working with families to explore options for a return to respite programming, including:

- Working with the participant's school, primary care provider, or other behavior support to create a behavior plan

- Establishing metrics, such as successful attendance at school with no behavior relapses, that can enable participation at Belong again
- Allowing a participant to return with their own Participant Support

Belong commits to communicating clearly with families about whether a participant's behavior at respite programming can be accommodated. We will also communicate clearly about what steps can be taken to assess a return to programming.

Under no circumstances will other Belong participants be the first test of whether a harmful behavior directed at others is managed. Belong will require an account from the participant's school or other regular group program (e.g., sports team, club, other respite care) that demonstrates the participant has participated regularly and successfully in a group setting without repeating the behavior.

Behavior of Participant Supports, Parents, and Other Participant Family Members

Highland Park United Methodist Church leadership reserves the right to bar any family member or Participant Support of a Belong participant from attending programming with the participant if their behavior is highly disruptive to Belong programming, harasses Belong staff or volunteers, or is highly disturbing to other participants.

If such behavior occurs, Belong staff will file an incident report with HPUMC's Risk Management office, which will communicate next steps with Belong and the individual(s) who are the subject of the incident report.

The behavior of a loved one or Participant Support will not impact a participant's access to Belong programming.

FAMILY ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF POLICIES

I have read and had an opportunity to ask questions about Belong Disability Ministry's participation policies. I acknowledge that failure to follow these policies may impact access or independent access to Belong programs for participants and their loved ones.

I understand it is my responsibility to ensure Belong has accurate information about the health and behavior support needs of participants.

Signed,

Participant (if over 18)

Parent or Guardian (if under 18 or under guardianship)