

Child and Youth Protection Policy

Introduction

A central tenet of the Christian faith is the inherent value and worth of all children, youth, and adults. Children and youth are least able to protect themselves in our society and are particularly vulnerable to abuse and neglect. _____ Church is desirous of doing what it can to protect the youth and children who participate in the life of this congregation.

We believe implementing a policy and adopting procedures to protect our children recognizes that:

Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to the little ones, the Children. The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church states that “. . . children must be protected from economic, physical and sexual exploitation and abuse.” Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, and exploitation occur in churches, both, large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural and racial lines. God calls us to make our Churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from abuse.

I. Definitions

A. “Child” and “Youth” and “Adult”

Following the public school system, a “child” is anyone age of 11 or under. A “youth” is anyone not a “child” and under the age of 18. An adult is anyone 18 years of age or older.

B. “Paid Staff Person,” “Adult Volunteer,” and “Screened Adult”

A Paid Staff Person is someone paid by the church, overseen by Staff Parish and screened. An Adult Volunteer is someone who has not been screened. They can work in a room with a Screened Adult or paid staff person. A Screened Adult is a volunteer who has gone through the screening process. These persons may or may not be members, but they must be regular attendees for at least six months. A regular attendee is someone who would be missed if they aren't in church.

C. “Child/Youth Abuse”

For purposes of this Policy, child/youth abuse is defined as any of the following:

1. Physical Abuse:

Violent non-accidental contact which results in injury. This includes, but is not limited to, striking, biting, or shaking. Injuries include bruises, fractures, cuts, and burns.

2. Sexual Abuse:

Any form of sexual activity with a child/youth, whether at the church, at home, or any other setting. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent, or another minor.

3. Emotional Abuse:

A pattern of intentional conduct which crushes a child's/youth's spirit attacks his/her self-worth through rejection, threats terrorizing, isolating, or belittling.

II. Screening and Selection of Church Staff and Adult Volunteers

- A. Adult volunteers who regularly work with the Church's children and youth and each church paid staff person will be screened. Those who work regularly with children/youth will be trained on child protection issues prior to beginning their regular involvement with children and youth. The procedures for screening are as follows: Each person being considered to work regularly with children and/or youth, whether as a volunteer or paid staff person, shall fill out an application form (See Appendix I). This screening is good for 5 years after which time a re-screening will be necessary.
- B. Before placing the applicant in a position of responsibility with children or youth, a designated paid staff member or other person charged with specific responsibility will interview the applicant reviewing with them the written application. (See possible questions for interviews in Appendix II.)
- C. The person conducting this interview will contact the references provided on the application form and any additional persons as the circumstances dictate. A written record of such contacts will be retained with the application form. (See Appendix III).
- D. Each person applying to work with children and/or youth shall authorize the church to conduct a criminal background check. A criminal background check will be conducted with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. For persons who have not lived in Florida for the past five years, a national background check will be conducted.
- E. Before beginning work with either children or youth, each paid staff member and volunteer will sign a statement that they have read, understood, and agree to abide by this Child And Youth Protection Policy.
- F. After the interview and background check have been accomplished, the decision will be made to accept or reject the applicant as a paid staff member or adult volunteer who will work with youth and/or children.
- G. Where it has been determined that an applicant should not work with children or youth, those persons involved with the decision shall handle it in a sensitive manner. The appropriate pastor or the Director of Children's Ministries shall inform the applicant in person. The specific reasons for the decision shall be given, whenever possible.
- H. All records shall be kept in a locked cabinet in the Church Administrator's office.
- I. Although not required to personally accomplish the above tasks, the pastors shall be responsible for ensuring compliance with sub-paragraphs (A) through (H) above.

III. Ongoing Education of Persons Who Work With Children and Youth

The Church shall ensure that regularly scheduled (i.e., at least annually) training focused on current issues of child protection is available to and received by those working with children and youth. Attendance at this training shall be required of all paid staff members, screened and non-screened adult volunteers who work consistently with children and/or youth.

The training shall include:

- A. The definition and recognition of child abuse.
- B. The Church's policy and procedures on child abuse and the reasons for having them.
- C. The need to maintain a positive classroom environment, including appropriate discipline and age-level characteristics.
- D. The appropriate behavior for teachers and leaders of child/youth events.
- E. Abuse reporting responsibilities and procedures.
- F. Definition of appropriate interpersonal boundaries.

IV. Supervision of Children and Youth

A. General Rules

- 1. All activities involving children and youth shall be supervised by at least one screened adult.
- 2. All rooms set aside for children/youth shall have a door with a window. Wherever possible, infants through pre-school children shall be cared for in rooms with half doors to reduce the risk of them wandering outside the classroom.

B. Supervision of Classroom Activities

1. Crib/Toddler to Grade 2

At least one screened adult shall be present for all classroom activities involving infants, toddlers, and children in grades K-2. When feasible, there shall be two screened adults present, and where the two adults are family members, it is preferable that a third adult be present. In addition, a designated person shall periodically check each classroom.

2. Grades 3-5

At least one screened adult shall be present for all classroom activities. Two screened adults are preferred. In addition, a designated person shall periodically check each classroom. Children shall be escorted to and from bathroom facilities or when otherwise leaving the room by either one of the supervising adults or by a designated floating person who checks on all classrooms. Where only one screened adult is present in the classroom, the classroom doors shall remain open.

3. Grades 6-12

At least one screened adult shall be present for all classroom activities. A designated person shall periodically check all classrooms.

C. Open Door Policy

Parents, volunteers or staff of the church shall be permitted, as reasonableness dictates, to visit and observe all programs and classrooms at any time.

D. Sign-in/Sign-out Procedure

Adults responsible for infants through toddler aged children shall sign-in their children and indicate the names of the authorized person(s) to whom the children may be signed-out. Adults responsible for children aged 2 through second grade shall sign their children in and out of Sunday School and other children's activities. Picking up children by non-authorized adults is prohibited.

E. Supervision of Non-Classroom Activities

At least two screened adults shall be present for all non-classroom activities involving children and/or youth. Any meetings held in an individual's home shall be supervised by at least two adults who are not members of the same family. Meetings held in an individual's home shall be pre-approved by the child's/youth's parent or guardian.

F. Counseling of Youth and Children

1. In instances of youth or child counseling where circumstances dictate that counseling would be most effective on a one-on-one basis, an appropriate church paid staff person may meet individually with a youth with the knowledge of at least one other paid staff member. At any counseling session with children or youth, the door of the room used shall remain open for the entire session, unless there is glass in the door or wall which gives a clear view into the room. If another adult is not in the building when the counseling occurs, the session shall be moved to a public place, such as an office area or outside where other people are present.
2. At the initial meeting, the counselor should first determine if they are qualified to address the child's/youth's needs effectively. Counseling should generally be limited to no more than three sessions. Referral to a licensed professional counselor should be considered for ongoing counseling needs.

G. Time Following Group Events

Following child/youth group events, it is inevitable that occasionally a child's/youth's transportation arrives after all other participants have departed. In those circumstances, a child/youth may unavoidably be supervised by one screened adult. Under these circumstances, the general rule requiring the presence of two screened adults is suspended and the screened adult is responsible for exercising his/her best judgment for the participant's well-being

V. Transportation

A. Requirements

1. All general child protection guidelines shall be maintained while transporting youth.
2. Drivers shall be known to the designated adult leader of the event.
3. One youth/child shall not be alone in a vehicle with one adult.

4. Drivers shall ensure that they are not alone in a vehicle with a single youth. In an emergency, such as when a parent is delayed and asks for the youth to be transported home, the driver will arrange for a second adult to accompany the driver and the youth. The adults may not be related and at least one of the adults shall be the same gender as the youth being transported.
5. When a child/youth is transported in any vehicle, the driver shall be either the child's/youth's parent/guardian, or a screened adult or a paid staff person who is at least 18 years old.
6. When a child/youth is transported in a church-owned vehicle, the driver shall be at least 21 years of age and have at least one year of driving experience.
7. Drivers shall have a valid driver's license for the vehicle being operated. For example, if driving a church bus, a commercial license is required.
8. Drivers shall require that seat belts be used at all times and the number of passengers shall not exceed the number of seat belts.
9. Drivers shall be advised of a designated route and shall not deviate from it except in cases of emergency or road detours.
10. When there is reason to believe it would not be safe for a youth to ride in a vehicle driven by another youth, the adults responsible shall intervene and take reasonable steps to make alternative arrangements for all concerned.
11. When a trip is planned and the destination is expected to be 100 miles or more from the point of departure, drivers are to be listed on an "approved driver list" maintained in the church office.
12. Persons who drive church owned vehicles or drive their personal vehicles for church sponsored events are to be listed on an "approved driver list" maintained in the church office.
13. In order to be listed on the "approved driver list" of drivers, a Motor Vehicle Record search shall be conducted and the Church Administrator shall review the record to determine if it is satisfactory according to guidelines established by the Conference Risk Management Office and forward the forms to the Conference.
14. Drivers shall read and sign an acknowledgment form indicating that the Child Protection Policy has been read and will be followed.

VI. Trip and Retreat Supervision

Trip and Retreat settings call for different child/youth protection requirements depending on the circumstances. The following requirements shall always be implemented. Depending on the circumstances of the setting, who is in attendance, etc., additional provisions may be implemented depending on the needs of the occasion.

A. Requirements

1. There shall be at least two screened adults present for all trips, retreats and other events where the children and/or youth gather overnight at, or away from the church campus.
2. There shall be at least one screened adult for each gender present at co-ed overnight events. At single gender overnight events, at least one of the two screened adults present shall be of the same gender as the child/youth.
3. The person in charge of youth/children for each overnight trip and/or retreat shall carry parental permission slips including permission for emergency medical care.
4. In a hotel type setting, at least two children/youth shall be assigned to each room.
5. Adults shall make random monitoring hall trips and room checks at night by adults of the same gender as those being checked.
6. Hotels shall be selected where the rooms open to the interior of building.

VII. Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

- A. Everyone in the church has a moral responsibility and a legal duty to report suspected abuse whenever it comes to their attention, regardless of where that abuse takes place. Reporting abuse is a form of ministering to the needs of those crying out for help.
- B. If abuse is observed by, disclosed to, or suspected by a volunteer and/or paid staff member of the church, the observer shall report the incident immediately to one of the pastors. If the appointed clergy and supply pastors is not available, the matter should be reported to the District Superintendent.
- C. If the accused is the appointed clergy and supply pastors or a member of her/his family, the allegations shall be immediately reported to the District Superintendent and immediately reported to the proper authorities as required by state or local law. The District Superintendent shall take responsibility and act according to established rules of The Book of Discipline with respect to claims against a pastor. If the District Superintendent is not available, the incident shall be reported to the Bishop's office in Lakeland.
- D. The parents of the victim shall be notified and whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety and well being of the child or youth shall be taken until the parent(s) arrive. NOTE: If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, the advice of the authorities concerning notification of others shall be followed.
- E. Immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the accused, the accused shall be removed from further involvement with children and/or youth. Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the safety of the child or youth is secured, the pastor or other designated staff person shall inform the accused that abuse has been reported.

- F. All allegations shall be taken seriously. The victim and the victim's family shall be shown care and support to help prevent further hurt. Pastoral resources shall be extended as needed. The church shall provide a supportive atmosphere to all those who are affected, offering both objectivity and empathy as it seeks to create a climate in which healing can take place.
- G. After having reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the pastor shall report the incident immediately to the District Superintendent. If the District Superintendent is unavailable, the incident shall be reported to the Bishop's office.
- H. A written report of the incident and the steps taken by the Church in response to the reported abuse shall be prepared. The report shall be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It shall be kept in a secure place. It shall be written in ink or typed to prevent it from being changed.
- I. Any contact with the media shall be handled by a spokesperson designated by the pastor. The Conference Communications Department shall be consulted as needed when media questions arise. The church spokesperson shall generally convey a spirit of concern for the spiritual, physical, and emotional well being of all who are affected, and shall communicate that the matter is being diligently and appropriately handled.

VIII. Implementation

Unless otherwise specifically stated, it shall be the responsibility of the Staff Parish Relations Committee to implement this Policy, to design and conduct future training, and to ensure the ongoing effectiveness of this Policy.

IX. Application

All of those who participate in the ministries of this congregation are expected to respect, implement, and adhere to these provisions.

[Name of Church]
Children and Youth Protection Policy
Participation Covenant

- I have read and understand the Child and Youth Protection Policy and agree to abide by the policies set forth therein.

- I agree to attend regular training and educational events provided by the church to keep informed of church policies.

- I agree to report any observation that a child or youth may be in jeopardy, according to the process provided in the policy.

Printed Name

Signature

Date

APPENDIX I

**[Name of] CHURCH
BACKGROUND CHECK INFORMATION FORM**

Name _____ Date of Birth _____

Race _____ Sex _____ Member of HPUMC? _____ No _____ Yes _____ How long? _____

Current Address: _____

Please list all former addresses for the last five years (include street address, city, county, state, and zip):

Current Home Telephone: _____ Current Business Telephone: _____

Occupation, current employer, and business address: _____

Time at this employment: _____ years _____ months Social Security Number: _____

List name and city of other churches you have attended regularly during the past five years: _____

Name, address, phone numbers of pastor, employer, and personal references who may be contacted:

Pastor: _____

Employer: _____

Personal: _____

Position for which you are staffing/volunteering: _____

Describe your background working with the program and/or age group requested. Include church-related, volunteer, and paid experience you may have.

(See reverse of form)

Have you ever been convicted of any criminal offense?	Yes	No
Have you ever been charged with or convicted of child neglect or abuse?	Yes	No
Have any complaints or allegations of misconduct involving children ever been made against you?	Yes	No
Have you been convicted of the possession, use, or sale of drugs?	Yes	No
Within the past 30 days have you abused alcohol, legal, or illegal drugs?	Yes	No
Have you been convicted or plead guilty to a traffic offense within the last 5 years?	Yes	No

Current drivers' license number: _____

Please explain fully any Yes answers to the above questions. In addition, please explain any fact or circumstance involving your background that would call into question your being entrusted with the supervision, guidance, and care of young people. Attach additional page, if necessary.

The information that I have provided may be verified by contacting persons or organizations that may have information concerning me. I hereby release and agree to hold harmless from liability any person or organization that provides information, and this release may be sent to any reference. I also agree to hold harmless [Name of] Church, and the officers, employees, and volunteers thereof from any use of this application or information. I waive any right that I may have to inspect references provided on my behalf.

I certify that the information I have provided is true and correct; if it is found that the answers given are untrue, I understand it may be cause for dismissal.

I understand that I am responsible for familiarizing myself with materials provided by [Name of] Church which describe ways to recognize child abuse and appropriate reporting procedures.

Signature

Date

Signature of Parent or Legal Guardian for Applicants Under the Age of 18 Date