

A RESOURCE PACKET

for Creating Safe Sanctuaries Guidelines

for Your Small Membership Church



Developed by:

The Child Protection Policy Group

East Ohio Conference

The United Methodist Church, 1999

Updated by:

The Safe Sanctuary Task Group, 2015

Spiritual Formation & Christian Education

Committee, 2017

SAMPLE SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY for THE SMALL MEMBERSHIP UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Introduction

Because we believe that Jesus taught us to care for His children, youth, and vulnerable persons, we commit our church to the practice of safe supervision. This policy will set standards for us for the supervision of vulnerable persons in our care. Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we adopt this policy for the prevention of vulnerable persons' abuse.

Purpose

Our congregation's purpose for establishing this Safe Sanctuary Policy is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all vulnerable persons in our church's care.

Statement of Covenant

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all our vulnerable persons, as well as those who work with them.

We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of those in our church who work with vulnerable persons. We will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events. We will educate all our workers with vulnerable persons regarding the use of all appropriate policies and procedures and the necessity of reporting any allegation of improper behavior. We will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law. (A written procedure should be attached to this policy.) We will be prepared to respond to media inquiries and the needs of all involved if an incident should occur. (A written plan should be attached to this policy.)

CONCLUSION

In all of our ministries with children, youth and adults, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each person will be "...surrounded by steadfast love...established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal." (Baptismal Covenant II, *United Methodist Hymnal*, p. 44)

Procedural details will be outlined in separate documents.

Adopted, this the _____ day of _____, 20_____.

SAMPLE SAFE SANCTUARY GUIDELINES

(Name of Church)
(Name of City), OH
Adopted _____, 20____

DEFINITIONS

Abuse – The infliction of physical pain or injury or the willful deprivation of services necessary to maintain mental and physical health, by a caregiver or other person.

Adult - a person at least 18 years of age and at least 5 years older than those being supervised.

Caregiver – An individual who has responsibility for the care of a vulnerable person as a result of a family relationship, or who has assumed that responsibility voluntarily, by contract, or as a result of the ties of friendship.

Child or Minor - a person under 18 years of age.

Child Abuse - consists of any of the following:

1. Engaging in any sexual activity with a child as defined under Chapter 2907 of the Ohio Revised Code; or
2. Endangering a child, as defined under Section 2919.22 of the Ohio Revised Code**; or
3. Denial, as means of punishment, of proper or necessary subsistence, education, medical care, or other care necessary to a child for the child’s health; or
4. Use of restraint procedures on a child that cause injury or pain; or
5. Administration of prescription drugs to a child without the written approval and ongoing supervision of a licensed physician; or
6. Providing alcoholic beverages or controlled substances to a child; or
7. Commission of any intentional act that results in any injury or death to a child; or
8. Infliction of physical or mental injury that threatens to harm a child’s health, welfare, or safety.

** in its present form, this law defines “child endangerment” to include any of the following: (1) abuse; or (2) torture or cruel abuse; or (3) corporal punishment or other physical discipline (e.g. such as spankings) or prolonged cruel restraint, which is excessive under the circumstances, and which could likely physically injure the child; or (4) repeated, uncalled-for discipline which, if continued, would seriously impair the child’s mental health or development; or (5) involving the child in any obscene, sexually-oriented, or nudity-oriented activity or conduct.

Emotional Abuse – The intentional or reckless infliction of emotional or mental anguish, or the use of a physical or chemical restraint, medication or isolation as punishment or as a substitute for treatment or care of any vulnerable person.

Exploitation – The expenditure, diminution, or use of the property, assets or resources of a vulnerable person without the express voluntary consent of that person or his or her legally-authorized representative.

Financial Exploitation – The use of deception, intimidation, undue influence, force or threat of force to obtain or exert unauthorized control over a vulnerable person’s property, with the intent to deprive the vulnerable person of that property.

Neglect – The failure of a caregiver or other person to provide food, shelter, clothing, medical services, medication or health care for a vulnerable person.

Ritual Abuse – regular intentional physical, sexual, or psychological violations of a vulnerable person to appeal to a higher authority of power

Rule of Three – For the times when the Two-Adult Rule cannot be supported, at least three individuals (at least one being an adult) will be present with vulnerable persons during church-related activities. An adult supervisor acting as a “premises monitor” will make unannounced visits frequently, particularly when the two-adult rule is not feasible, and will patrol hallways and common areas within the church facility when vulnerable persons’ activities are taking place.

Staff Person – Any person employed by the church.

Two-Adult Rule – Two non-related adult workers will be present with vulnerable persons during church-related activities whenever possible except in emergency situations.

Volunteer – A person eighteen (18) years of age or older who assists in conducting activities for vulnerable persons.

Vulnerable Person– Any child or youth, as well as any adult whose behavior indicates that he or she is mentally or emotionally incapable of adequately caring for himself or herself and his or her interests without adverse consequences to himself or herself or others, or who, because of physical or mental impairment, is unable to protect himself or herself from abuse, neglect, exploitation, sexual abuse, or emotional abuse by others.

Safe Sanctuary - a policy and guidelines developed to protect our vulnerable persons in order to make our congregation a safe place where everyone may experience the abiding love of God and fellowship within the community of faith. This includes children’s check in/out procedures, training and background checks for those working with vulnerable persons, and procedures that guide the interaction of children, youth and adults.

SELECTION, SCREENING and TRAINING

(See other Conference sample policy for sample screening and application forms)

We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers, including keeping applications on file for all workers, paid and volunteer, and completing national background checks for all workers, paid and volunteer. All volunteers who supervise children and youth in our church will be at least five years older than any children/youth they supervise, and will have been actively involved in our church ministry for at least six months. (When youth helpers are used, they will be at least 12 years of age, and will be supervised by adults.)

We will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events, including the two non-related, non-cohabitating adult rule, the rule of three, and an open door policy. No adult will be alone with just one

child or youth at a church sponsored event. No event/ministry will take place with only one adult present. No children will be left unsupervised. (Written guidelines should be attached to this policy—see sample below.)

We will educate all of our workers with vulnerable persons regarding the use of all appropriate policies and the necessity of reporting any allegation of improper behavior.

We will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirement of state law. (Written guidelines should be attached to this policy—see sample below.)

We will be prepared to respond to media inquiries and the needs of all involved if an incident should occur. (Written guidelines should be attached to this policy—see with “Response to Allegations” sample below.)

In an effort to create a safe environment within our church, volunteers working with vulnerable persons and all paid staff will be screened and will be trained on safe sanctuaries guidelines.

SAMPLE SAFE SANCTUARY OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES for SMALL CHURCHES

All who supervise children/youth in our church will be at least 5 years older than any children/youth they supervise, and will have been actively involved in our church ministry for at least 6 months. (When youth helpers are used, they will be at least 12 years of age and will be supervised by adults at all times).

1. Use large open space (such as a fellowship hall) sectioned in areas for children and adults or multiple children’s classes all in the same space (along the lines of “pod” style schooling).
2. If using traditional classroom set up, use a floater as your second adult who constantly roams and checks on spaces with children.
3. If only one child shows up, move that class to a public space for the day.
4. Use rule of 3—at least 3 persons at all times could be 2 children with an adult (Would still need a roaming 2ndadult in this situation.)
5. Contact Conference Council on Ministries office for simple, affordable options for background checks.
6. Keep applications on file for all workers, paid and volunteer, and completing national background checks for all workers paid and volunteers.
7. Encourage parents to take children to the bathroom before they come to class, if a bathroom break is necessary check bathroom has no adults in it. Stand outside the bathroom and let child go, making sure no adults go into the bathroom while child is in the bathroom. Have child take a buddy if possible. If a child needs assistance, we will have two adults present.
8. Have a training for adults and youth helpers working with vulnerable persons on local church guidelines and the reasons for them. The East Ohio Annual Conference can provide names of those who would be able to help with this training. A Conference video is available at the media center to help with local church training. (Local churches do not need to be media center members to utilize this resource.)
9. Given the increased use of technology and social media in the life of the church and its individual members, faith communities have a responsibility to define social media policies for our church that uphold the covenant to create Safe Sanctuaries for vulnerable persons.

SAMPLE PROCEDURE for RESPONSE TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE and MEDIA INQUIRY

As caring Christians, we are committed to protect and advocate for vulnerable persons participating in the life of the church. We seek to provide a supportive atmosphere, offering both objectivity and empathy as we seek to create a climate in which healing can take place. It is our legal and moral responsibility to report suspected abuse whenever it comes to our attention regardless of where that abuse takes place.

Be prepared to do the following:

PLEASE NOTE: MANY STEPS SHOULD BE DONE SIMULTANEOUSLY

- Secure any needed emergency medical help and address any needs the person may have. This may include calling 911 when needed.
- **IMMEDIATELY** notify the proper authorities (children services board, the county department of human services exercising the children services function, or a local law enforcement agency in the county in which the children/youth resides or in which the suspected abuse occurred). This is a requirement of the law. Reference section 2151.421 of the Ohio Revised Code. Do not attempt an investigation. This should be left to the professionals who are familiar with these cases.
- Simultaneously notify the parents or legal guardian of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety of the children/youth until the parent(s) or legal guardian arrives. It is important to emphasize that the proper authorities must be notified even if the parent(s) or legal guardian do not wish the incident to be reported.
- Note: if one or both of the parents or legal guardian is the alleged abuser, contact the proper authorities. Follow their advice about notification of the parents.
- Take any allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim's family. Showing care and support help to prevent further hurt. Extend whatever pastoral resources are needed. Remember that the care and safety of the victim is the first priority. Respond in a positive and supportive manner to the alleged victim and the victim's family.
- After having reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the incident is to be reported immediately to the church's attorney, the church's insurance company, and the district superintendent. Do not try to handle this without professional assistance. If the accused is a clergy member of the annual conference, local pastor, or diaconal minister, provisions of Paragraph 363 and Paragraphs 2701-2719 of *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2012* must be followed.
- A written report of the basic information shall be kept to ensure on-going ministry to, and advocacy for, victims and others involved. Use the "Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse" form for this report. The report shall be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It shall be filed in a secure place in order to ensure confidentiality. It shall be written in ink or typed to prevent it from being changed. The report shall be filed in the church office where it shall remain confidential.
- Immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the accused, remove the accused from further involvement with vulnerable persons.
- Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the safety of the vulnerable person is secured, the pastor or other designated person may tell the accused that a report has been made. If the accused is a volunteer or paid staff of the church, that person shall be temporarily relieved of his or her

duties until the investigation is finished. If the accused is a paid staff person of the church, arrangements should be made to either maintain or suspend his or her income until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.

Any contact with the media should be handled by the Conference Communications Department as part of the Crisis Response Plan (in cooperation and coordination with the Director of Connectional Ministries). Care will be taken to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved. The spokesperson should generally convey that the matter is under investigation and any comments would be premature.