

Hopewell United Methodist Church
SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY

INTRODUCTION

The General Conference of the United Methodist Church, in April, 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child abuse in the church. The adopted resolution calls all churches to welcome the children and also to make our churches safe places for children to grow and learn. It is our responsibility to be proactive in our recruiting and training to find people with a gift for caring for children and also to protect those volunteers from false accusations. It is also our responsibility to oversee all programs involving children to make sure there is a safe environment and to have a plan of response in place should an accusation arise. The General Conference resolution affirmed that every church shall have a policy for protecting children.

PURPOSE

Wesleyan Chapel United Methodist Church's (UMC) purpose for establishing this Child Abuse Prevention Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety, emotional well being and spiritual growth of all our children and youth. In addition, provisions as applicable cover adult abusive behavior with another adult(s) in our church.

STATEMENT OF COVENANT

As a Christian community of faith committed to ministry to and with children, we pledge to conduct all our activities and ministries in such a way that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all children and youth entrusted to us. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of volunteers and we will be responsible in overseeing our programs and events and in training our volunteers, so that they are able and equipped to minister to children in Jesus' name. We will report and respond to all suspected incidents of abuse as is required by state law and our moral conscience and we will be prepared to minister to the families of both the abused and the perpetrator.

PROCEDURES

We adopt these **minimum** standards for our ministries with children and youth.

1. Screening and recruiting of **regular workers**, defined as paid staff and/or volunteers.
 - a. All regular workers working with children and youth will have completed an application listing standard contact information, work and volunteer experience, their gifts for that ministry and three (3) unrelated references. The application package will include a copy of this policy.
 - b. All regular workers will be interviewed by the Pastor, Sunday School Superintendent, or a member of the Safe Committee before they begin teaching. References may be contacted.
 - c. All regular workers will demonstrate an active relationship with this church of at least six (6) months before being allowed to supervise children.
 - d. All regular workers will be asked to complete a Maryland request for a driving record check.

- e. All forms and reference reports shall be kept as a part of an applicant's confidential personnel file. All forms shall be kept in a locked file on the church premise.
 - f. An annual Sexual Misconduct Questionnaire will be completed by all current regular workers.
2. **Occasional workers**, defined as those adults who teach or lead groups less than once per month, as a substitute or chaperone, may volunteer under the direction of other trained, regular workers by completing only a Sexual Misconduct Questionnaire prior to volunteering.
- a. All occasional workers will receive a copy of this policy.
 - b. An annual Sexual Misconduct Questionnaire will be completed by all occasional workers.
3. **Youth workers**, defined as those 13-17 years of age who assist adult volunteers will complete a Youth Covenant agreeing to conduct themselves in an appropriate manner/demeanor when assisting with younger children.
- a. All youth workers will receive a copy of this policy.
 - b. All youth workers who work on a regular basis must be trained on Safe Sanctuary procedures. Refer to section #4.
 - c. An annual Sexual Misconduct Questionnaire will be completed all youth workers.
4. **Training** – Regular workers and youth workers who routinely work with children and youth in Church Ministry Activities will receive proper training:
- a. Initial Training – Workers must be trained on Safe Sanctuary procedures prior to the beginning of their service.
 - b. Refresher Training – Every five years, workers must be retrained.
 - c. If changes to the policy are made, notification will be made in writing. For significant policy changes, additional training may be required.
5. **Supervision in the Classroom**
- a. Two (2) adult rule. There will be two (2) non-spousal adults or 1 adult and a rover teacher who moves amid the classroom during the program period.
 - b. No person shall solely supervise an age group unless he/she is at least five (5) years older than the oldest student. No person under eighteen (18) shall be considered as one of the adults or roving teacher.
 - c. Each room will have a window or the door will be left open at all times.
6. **Supervision on Trips**
- a. At least two regular workers, or one regular worker and an occasional worker are required for all day trips.
 - b. At least two regular workers, or one regular worker and an occasional worker, of each gender are required for all overnight trips.

- c. Separate rooms must be provided for male and female participants on all overnight trips, with the exception of married couples who do not have supervisory responsibilities.
- d. Adults may occupy the same rooms as youth, provided there are at least two adults in a room. Recognizing that accommodations may be restrictive in some cases, there is a preferred minimum of two adults and four youth per room.
- e. Adults should avoid situations where they are alone with youth in a room.
- f. Youth will not share a bed with an adult. An exception could be made for an adult who is a family member.
- g. Visitation between male and females in bedrooms is prohibited unless directly supervised in a group setting with the adult leaders for devotional or group discussion times.
- h. One-on-one counseling between adults and youth is not permitted. In situations that require personal conferences, the meeting is to be conducted in view of other adults.

7. **Permission Forms**

- a. Permission forms are recommended for activities/events in which youth and children are outside direct supervision of their parents/guardians.
- b. Permission forms will include pertinent health information in order to participate.

8. **Reporting** - The reporter is the person aware of the alleged abuse and needs to report it.
- a. The reporter's first responsibility is to protect the child by removing him or her from the location of the accused, securing the scene, and safeguarding any other children in the accused person's care.
 - b. The reporter must also contact the Pastor, Director of Christian Education (CE), or Youth Group (YG) Director to inform him or her of the situation. If none of the above are available, the reporter will perform functions d.through h. below in his/her place.
 - c. The Pastor, CE Director, or YG Director upon receiving information or allegation of abuse or neglect, shall immediately:
 - d. Comply with Maryland law by reporting the abuse or neglect to the Department of Social Services. Maryland law requires verbal notice immediately and written notice within 48 hours of the initial report.
 - e. The law being referred to is Code of Maryland Regulations, Department of Human Resources, Title 07, Subtitle 02, Chapter 07 (Child Protective Services – Investigation of Child Abuse and Neglect).
 - f. Within 48 hours, a written report must be made. Social Services will provide forms to do this written communication.
 - g. Inform the Director of Christian Education, the SPRC Chair (if the abuse involves a pastor or staff person), and District Superintendent, if they don't already know.
 - h. Without identifying the victim or the accused, the Pastor will inform the congregation of the alleged incident of abuse or neglect and the actions taken by the church to respond to the incident and to safeguard children and youth in the church's ministries.

9. **Responding**

- a. A quick, compassionate and unified response to an alleged incident of child abuse will be initiated. All allegations will be taken seriously and kept confidential. Nothing will be covered up.
- b. The Pastor will remove the accused from further work with children and youth until the investigation is complete as determined by the Pastor. The person accused of abuse will be notified in writing of this suspension.
- c. Media Director of the Baltimore-Washington Conference or his/her designee is the only person(s) authorized to make statements to the representatives of the media. All requests for statements should be directed to the Lead Pastor.
- d. Pastoral support will be available to all persons involved in the incident as indicated.
- e. After the initial communication to the congregation, the Pastor may conduct a follow-up meeting with the congregation to address the concerns of the congregation. This meeting will include lay leadership and, if necessary, Baltimore-Washington Conference representation.
- f. The church will not retaliate against any person who brings forward a complaint.

10. **Background checks**

- a. All regular workers and paid staff members must complete the application package to authorize and request a criminal records check. The records check agency will provide the appropriate blank forms(s) to be used for the background checks. A valid, current background check from another source may be considered. Documentation should be provided to the Safe Sanctuary Committee.
- b. The Safe Sanctuary Committee will utilize agencies that specialize in church related activities to do the background check(s) that meet the BWC requirements.
- c. The Safe Sanctuary Committee will have the custodial responsibility to see that the forms are completed and forwarded to a records check agency.
- d. All forms and replies from the records check agency will be maintained in strict confidence within the Safe Sanctuary Committee and be safeguarded appropriately.
- e. The Safe Sanctuary Committee will develop guidelines to define unacceptable behavior.
- f. Regular workers and paid staff cannot begin any functions until the record checking agency's report is received and evaluated.
- g. The pastor's background check is required by Conference and is also monitored by Conference.
- h. Background checks are an ongoing process and will be updated every five years.
- i. The cost of the background checks is an expense of the church.

Amended on November 5, 2014 by the Church Council of Hopewell United Methodist Church.