

Policies & Procedures for the Protection of Children & Youth at Westhampton UMC

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PURPOSE

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 called for all churches to obey Jesus' mandate to welcome children as we would welcome him and to make all churches safe places for children to learn and grow. It affirmed that every local church shall have in place a policy for protecting children and youth. It is an important purpose of the members and staff of Westhampton UMC (the "Church") to provide that safe and secure environment for all children and youth entrusted to our care. We do this to encourage them and their families to grow in their relationship with God and one another. The following policy and procedures are for the protection of our children, youth, employees, volunteers and our entire church family at Westhampton UMC.

SCOPE

This policy shall apply to all current and future workers, compensated and/or volunteer, who will have the responsibility of supervising, directing, coordinating, teaching and/or assisting the activities of children and youth at the Church.

DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of this policy the following definitions shall apply:

1. "Children," "youth," and "minors" shall be defined as any individual *under* the age of eighteen (or whose mental capacity is that of a minor).
2. "Adult" shall be defined as any individual at least eighteen years of age.
3. "Worker" shall be defined as any adult who serves as a volunteer and/or paid person given the responsibility of working with or caring for minors. While the levels of authority and autonomy, as well as the types of tasks accomplished, may differ between staff, regular ministry leaders, and occasional volunteers, all three are covered in this policy.
4. "Child Abuse" shall be defined as physical, emotional/mental, sexual, or ritual abuse or neglect of a minor.
5. "Criminal Background Check" ("CBC") is the procedure used to perform a national check of the background of adult employees and volunteer workers for criminal activity using the online product of ScreeningOne, <http://www.screeningone.com/> (which provides access to these reports for 7 years), or another qualified agency that the Virginia Annual Conference recommends.

WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE?

The abuse of children and youth consists of 5 categories:

1. Physical Abuse: abuse in which a person deliberately and intentionally causes bodily harm to a minor.
2. Emotional/Mental Abuse: abuse in which a person exposes a minor to spoken and/or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty.
3. Neglect: abuse in which a person endangers a minor's health, safety, or welfare through negligence, including medical neglect.
4. Sexual Abuse: abuse in which sexual contact between a minor and an adult (or another older and more powerful youth) occurs.
5. Ritual Abuse: abuse in which physical, sexual, or psychological violations of a minor are inflicted regularly, intentionally, and in a stylized way by a person or persons responsible for the minor's welfare.

WORKER ENLISTMENT PROCEDURE

Criminal background checks *will* be performed on each prospective worker after signing a Background Investigation Consent form, and prior to being enlisted as a worker. A new criminal background check will be performed at least every 5 years, and more frequently if recommended by the Confidential Screening Committee.

Only members of the Confidential Screening Committee (consisting of the Pastor and his/her designees, the Administrative Assistant, the Director of Children & Youth, and the Chair of Christian Education for Children & Youth) of the Church will have access to the results of a criminal background check.

Any prospective worker who has a prior incident of sexual misconduct or child abuse will be prohibited from serving in any capacity where they would have contact with minors, unless an exception is approved by the Confidential Screening Committee.

At the worker's request, the Church shall allow the applicant to review his/her criminal history record transcript.

WORKER FORMS

All workers involved in activities or programs for minors of the Church will be required to complete the Release and Authorization Form providing personal and confidential information for a Criminal Background Check. All personal information voluntarily disclosed, the results of all security background checks, or the refusal of any person to participate in a program or activity in lieu of such disclosure requirements, will be maintained in the strictest of confidence. Additionally, Social Security Numbers are required in order to conduct the Background Check. Once the screening is complete, the results will be accessible for 7 years through ScreeningOne. The Church office does not keep Social Security Numbers of church members on file and uses EnTrust Records Management to destroy confidential information.

On an annual basis, all workers shall complete the online “Child Abuse & Neglect: Recognizing, Reporting, and Responding” webinar offered through the Virginia Department of Social Services (https://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/cps/mandated_reporters/cwse5691/story_html5.html), and submit proof of completion to be on file at the Church. Additionally, all workers shall agree to the Basic Procedures for Safe Ministry with Children and Youth and the Worker Covenant.

PARTICIPANT FORMS

Parents and/or responsible adults must complete participant forms for each child and youth under the age of 18. These forms are to gather necessary information for the safety and wellbeing of children and youth when they are in the Church’s care. These forms may include but are not limited to emergency contact information, medical release, transportation permission, and internet photo release.

REPORTING CHILD ABUSE

Should there be an allegation of child abuse at Westhampton United Methodist Church, the following procedures shall be followed:

1. Any allegation of child abuse shall be treated seriously.
2. Prayer for the church and all persons affected by the allegation shall be encouraged.
3. Documentation shall begin immediately including all procedures which occur in handling the allegation. All conversations and actions shall be documented in writing.
4. The pastor shall be notified immediately, unless the allegation(s) involve the pastor. If the pastor is involved or unavailable, the Chair of the Child Protection Committee should be briefed on the

substance of the allegation(s). As many members of the Child Protection Committee as are immediately accessible shall be convened either in person or by telephone. The function of the Child Protection Committee at this stage is not to conduct an investigation, but to determine, based upon the allegation(s) and the information then in the possession of the Child Protection Committee, whether the allegation(s) is/are reportable to the Virginia Department of Social Services. In making such a determination, the Child Protection Committee shall avail itself of such counsel as it deems necessary and as is immediately available, including, but not limited to, consultation with an attorney, with a representative of the church's insurance company, with the district superintendent, and anonymously with the Virginia Department of Social Services. If deemed reportable, the Child Protection Committee will report the incident to the Department of Social Services within 24 hours as required by law, and the pastor will notify the district superintendent.

- a. If the allegation(s) involve the pastor, the Chairperson of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee shall also be notified immediately and he or she shall immediately notify the district superintendent, who shall direct the next steps taken by the Church in responding to the allegation(s). The provisions of this Policy shall continue to apply except as the district superintendent directs that other steps be taken. If the Child Protection Committee reasonably believes that the incident is reportable, but the district superintendent directs otherwise, the Child Protection Committee will report the incident to the Department of Social Services within 24 hours as required by law.

5. The following persons will be notified immediately by the pastor and/or the Child Protection Committee:

- a. The Department of Social Services

Reports may be made by calling the local Department of Social Services or the following hotline which is open 24 hours a day/7 days a week:

Children/Youth 1-800-552-7096

- b. Follow-up will be made based upon recommendation by Department of Social Services, and may include:

1. Parents of the victim
2. Parents of the accused (if the accused is a minor)
3. The District Superintendent
4. The church's insurance company

6. The accused shall not be confronted with the allegation(s). If the accused has assigned duties within the life of the Church and the Child Protection Committee determines that the steps outlined in part (4.) above are appropriate, that person must be temporarily relieved of their duties until the investigation is concluded. If accused is a full-time, paid worker, the accused will continue to receive pay until the dispute is resolved for up to six weeks. If the accused is a part-time, paid worker, the accused will receive no pay while relieved from duty.

7. The pastor should extend whatever care and resources are necessary to those impacted by the allegation(s), but under no circumstance should any member investigate the allegation(s) except as directed by the pastor, district superintendent, or other legal authority. In providing care to the alleged victim and the accused and their families, discussion of the truth or falsity of the allegation(s) which could contaminate the investigation should be avoided. Blame shall not be assigned nor steps taken that involve establishing or refuting the allegation(s).

8. It is appropriate to show care and comfort for the alleged victim. This should be the pastoral objective from the moment the allegation(s) is/are received or otherwise made known.

9. Confidentiality shall be observed for both the alleged victim and the accused until advised to the contrary by the Child Protection Committee.

10. The pastor or in his/her absence a designee shall be a single spokesperson for the Church.

CONCLUSION

In all our ministries with children and youth, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child 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.)

BASIC PROCEDURES FOR SAFE MINISTRY WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Based in part on *Safe Sanctuaries - Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church* ¹

The “Two Adult Rule”

The “Two Adult Rule” requires that no fewer than two adult workers should be present at all times during a church sponsored program, event, or ministry involving children or youth. Risk will be reduced more if the two adults are unrelated. Abusers thrive on secrecy, isolation, and their ability to manipulate victims. When abusers know they will not be left alone, they lose interest in working with minors.

If there are any overnight church events, supervision in sleeping quarters must be by adults of the same gender as the participants. Adults will not share the same bed with a child or youth under any circumstances.

The “Six Months Rule”

The “Six Months Rule” requires all volunteer workers with children and youth to be involved with Westhampton UMC for at least six months (unless an exception is made by the pastor) before they are allowed in any position of responsibility for minors. If a volunteer has been involved at Westhampton UMC for less than six months, they may assist the two unrelated adult workers.

The “Five-Years Older Rule”

Workers for youth ministry shall be a minimum of five years older than the oldest youth.

The “No Workers under age 18 Rule”

Putting children in charge of children invites disaster. It is common practice in many churches to allow junior or high school aged volunteers to supervise nursery or young children. People under the age of eighteen cannot be expected to have developed the maturity and judgment that is needed to fully respond to young children. However, people under age eighteen can *assist* an adult worker, but they should not substitute for an adult under the Two Adult Rule (see above), nor should they ever be alone with a child.

¹ Melton, Joy Thornburg, *Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth*, Discipleship Resources. Go to: www.discipleshipresources.org and search for “Safe Sanctuaries.”

Windows in All Classroom Doors

Each room set aside for children and youth should have a door with a window in it, or a half door. A window removes the opportunity for secrecy and isolation. A half door offers protection against children wandering outside the classroom and allows for full visual access. Adding a window to the pastor's office door protects against false allegations of misconduct. The view into any classroom or office should be clear and unobstructed at all times. Any classroom doors without windows should remain open at all times, unless there is an immediate security threat that may be reasonably deemed more dangerous than the present danger of abuse.

Open-Door Counseling

At any counseling sessions with children or youth, the doors on the room used should remain open for the entire session, ideally when others are nearby, even though not in listening distance. Counseling sessions conducted behind closed doors are a breeding ground for false allegations of abuse. Closed doors make it easy for a child abuser to act.

Internet & Social Media Guidelines

The Church recognizes that the internet provides distinctive opportunities to participate in interactive discussions and share information on particular topics using a variety of social media, such as websites, blogs and wikis. However, worker use of social media can pose risks to the Church's confidential information and reputation, it can expose the Church to legal claims, and it can jeopardize the Church's compliance with business laws and regulations.

- Workers should consider that the Church has spent substantial time and resources building its reputation and goodwill. These are valuable and important assets to the Church. Before undertaking any social media activity that identifies any person of the Church or that identifies the Church, workers must consider whether that post or activity may damage the Church's reputation.
- Workers may not use photographs of the Church or its employees, students, families or vendors without approval. Tagging individuals must also be approved.
- When conducting online meetings with participants, workers must confirm that an adult is physically present with participants.

- When recording a virtual gathering, this should be announced at the beginning of the event and information regarding how the recording will be shared should also be disclosed at this time.

First Aid/CPR Training

Providing first aid and CPR training on a bi-annual basis for all church workers with children and youth is a basic step to assure the safety of children. Having workers who are prepared to deal with bumps, bruises, and scrapes with competency goes a long way toward building the confidence of children and parents.

Our Emergency Procedure is as follows:

1. Call 911.
2. Contact parent(s).
3. Transport child to receive appropriate medical treatment. If the child has any specific allergies or medications that must be considered, it is recommended that the child have medical instructions on his/her person (either bracelet or necklace ID).

Annual Training for all Workers

All workers (staff and volunteer) with children and youth must participate in an annual Safe Sanctuary training session. All new workers with children and youth must attend a Safe Sanctuary training session before taking on any leadership roles. This training may be led by an outside consultant, by the congregation's pastor or designated leaders, or may be led by Joy Thornburgh Melton's Safe Sanctuaries DVD. Other forms of training may be developed in the future and should also be considered.

Covenants for All Youth Participants and Adult Workers

A written covenant of participation should be provided to all youth participants and adult workers in which they agree to: (1) take part in the ministry, (2) give their best efforts to the ministry, (3) respect the other participants, and (4) treat others as well as they would wish to be treated. Such a covenant is especially useful for establishing the onset of behavior standards expected by everyone. It is also an important reminder for leaders that abusive behavior toward the children and youth will not be tolerated.

Advance Notice to Parents

A basic rule with children and youth ministry is to always give parents advance notice and full information regarding the event(s) in which their children will participate. Before the event, parents must give written permission for their child to participate and share any helpful information regarding their child. Churches are protected insofar as the parent(s) has(have) been informed of the event. Advance information gives a guideline to parents about scheduling and allows parent and child to decide if the event and its content are suitable for their participation. It also demonstrates that the church has planned thoroughly to provide the safest experience.

Parent and Family Education

When a congregation has a commitment to a comprehensive plan for the prevention of child abuse with its ministries, it will want to provide information about the plan to the congregation and parents. A family education event or series of events is highly effective in disseminating ² the components of the church's plan. An event could include: (1) a speaker from your local law enforcement agency, (2) a speaker from a local child protective service agency, (3) a doctor or counselor who is experienced in treating abused children, (4) an attorney experienced in advising churches about risk management or loss prevention, (5) a video about the incidence of child sexual abuse within churches, (6) printed copies of your church's abuse prevention policies and procedures, (7) a time for worship and prayer.

Appropriate Equipment and Supervision

It is very important for those planning ministries with children and youth to think through in advance, the advantages and disadvantages of the setting they are considering. If the ministry involves using special equipment, knowledge of its operation should be familiar. Children should never be left alone at all.

² Another resource, including a DVD for church members and resource materials for leaders is: *Reducing the Risk II, Making Your Church Safe from Child Sexual Abuse*, Church Law and Tax Report, P. O. Box 1098, Matthews, NC 28106. Go to the bookstore at: www.churchlawtoday.com.

Child Protection Committee

The Charge Conference, upon nomination by the committee on nominations and leadership development, shall elect a Child Protection Committee every 2 years. The membership of the Child Protection Committee shall include the pastor and not less than three nor more than five members of the Church. The Child Protection Committee shall review the policy at least every other year and may propose revisions to Church Council at any time. The Child Protection Committee is responsible for the administration and interpretation of the Policy and Procedures.

Adequate Insurance for the Scope of Your Ministry

Every local church needs to be adequately insured for the scope of its ministry. During the 2016 General Conference a petition was adopted to guide churches in ensuring adequate coverage. The *2016 United Methodist Book of Discipline* now states:

The board of trustees shall annually compare the existence and adequacy of the church's insurance coverages to an insurance schedule annually published by the General Council on Finance and Administration. The purpose of this review is to ensure that the church, its properties, and its personnel are properly protected against risks. The board shall include in its report to the charge conference (§ 2550.7) the results of its review and recommendations needed to timely bring the church into compliance with the published schedule.

**CHECKLIST FOR RESPONSE TO ALLEGATION OF CHILD / SEXUAL ABUSE TO
BE COMPLETED BY CLERGY / PROFESSIONAL STAFF PERSONS**

In the case of an allegation of child/youth sexual abuse, the volunteer worker or clergy staff person who observes or to whom the information is given is required by the Church and by the state law to complete the tasks listed below. Date and initial as each step is completed. Note: If allegation is against the Pastor, the report should go to the chairperson of the Staff Parish Relations Committee and the District Superintendent.

Date: _____	Initial: _____	1. For clergy and paid professional staff: remove the accused from the situation and suspend the accused from duties involving children/youth.
Date: _____	Initial: _____	For volunteers: Remove the accused from the situation and immediately notify the closest available clergy/professional staff person who will suspend the accused. If the clergy/professional staff person to whom the allegation is reported is not the direct supervisor of the accused, the person reporting will inform the supervisor as soon as possible.
Date: _____	Initial: _____	2. Make written documentation of everything done and said. If the person reporting the allegation is a volunteer, both the volunteer and the clergy/professional staff to whom the volunteer has reported will document the procedures taken.

The procedures after this point will be administered by ministerial staff persons only.

Date: _____	Initial: _____	3. Immediately notify the parents/guardians of the alleged victim and respond to their questions and concerns.
Date: _____	Initial: _____	4. Determine whether the incident requires immediately notification of state authorities.
Date: _____	Initial: _____	5. Immediately notify the pastor.
Date: _____	Initial: _____	5a. If the allegations involve the pastor, the Chairperson of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee shall also be notified immediately and he or she shall immediately notify the district superintendent who shall direct the next steps taken by the Church in responding to the allegation
Date: _____	Initial: _____	6. Make written documentation of persons contacted and action taken to this point.
Date: _____	Initial: _____	7. The clergy/professional staff person will immediately establish a small response team to begin the internal and pastoral care process.
Date: _____	Initial: _____	a. notify the insurance carrier of the incident immediately and comply with its investigation, if any;
Date: _____	Initial: _____	b. cooperate with legal and state authorities in their investigations, if any;
Date: _____	Initial: _____	c. prepare a written statement and designate a spokesperson to respond to media inquiries;
Date: _____	Initial: _____	d. provide assistance to the alleged victim and his/her family in obtaining counseling or referral to a mental health professional, if needed; determine whether the alleged victim's counseling expenses can be reimbursed by the Church or the insurance carrier;

Date: _____	Initial: _____	e. respond to the needs of the families of the alleged victim and the accused to seek a redemptive solution for all involved
Date: _____	Initial: _____	f. inform the affected volunteer(s) and paid staff members of the need for confidentiality, and;
Date: _____	Initial: _____	8. Consider and respond to the concerns of other parents.
Date: _____	Initial: _____	9. The director of the affected ministerial area will respond to the pastoral care concerns of persons within the department
Date: _____	Initial: _____	10. Make written documentation of persons contacted and action taken