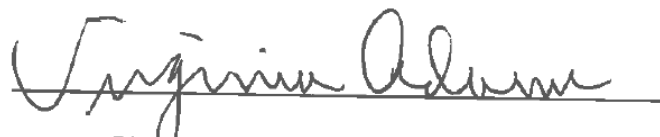


Policies & Procedures for the Protection of Children & Youth at Westhampton UMC

Revised in 2023 by WUMC's Child Protection Committee:
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Proposed by Child Protection Committee: July 1, 2023

Approved by Church Council: July 9, 2023

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Virginia Adams", written over a horizontal line.

Signature, Church Council Chair

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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 (referred to as the "Child Protection Policy") shall apply to all current and future workers, compensated and/or volunteers, 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 has been deemed 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 FORMS AND BACKGROUND CHECK

Each prospective worker will complete a Westhampton UMC Child Protection Policy Form and the Adult Worker Covenant of Conduct ([Appendix A](#)) prior to being enlisted as a worker and at least annually to acknowledge they understand this policy and agree to abide by the policy.

All workers involved in activities or programs for minors of the Church are required to complete the Background Check Release and Authorization Form providing personal and confidential information for a criminal background check prior to being enlisted as a worker. Criminal background checks report criminal activity in the past 5 years and include Social Security Trace, State Criminal Court Search, Federal Criminal Records Search, National Criminal Search including Sex Offender and OFAC. Once the screening is complete, the results will be accessible for 7 years through ScreeningOne. A new criminal background check will be performed at least every 5 years, and more frequently if recommended by the Confidential Screening Committee. ScreeningOne provides the applicant with a way to review their criminal history record transcript.

Prospective workers will be required to acknowledge a statement indicating that they have never been convicted of child abuse nor had such a conviction expunged. Anyone who has a prior incident of sexual misconduct, conviction of child abuse, or expungement, as well as anyone refusing to acknowledge the statement, 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 (consisting of the Pastor and their designees, the Administrative Assistant, the Director of Children & Youth, and the Chair of Faith Formation). Within 4 months of the adoption of this policy, all existing workers will comply with this paragraph to continue in their positions.

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. Only members of the Confidential Screening Committee will have access to the results of a criminal background check. Social Security Numbers are required in order to conduct the Background Check. However, the Church office does not keep Social Security Numbers of church members on file and shreds documents with this information after requesting the background check.

CHILD PARTICIPANT FORMS

Parents and/or responsible adults must complete participant forms for each child and youth under the age of 18. These forms gather necessary information for the safety and well-being 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.

Youth who wish to participate in ministries hosted by the Church must complete the Youth Covenant ([Appendix B](#)) at least annually.

REPORTING AND RESPONDING TO CHILD ABUSE OR NEGLECT

Any allegation of child abuse or neglect shall be treated seriously. Should there be an allegation of child abuse or neglect of a child who was in the care of Westhampton United Methodist Church, the following procedures (also provided in checklist form in [Appendix C](#)) shall be followed:

1. Documentation shall begin immediately including all procedures which occur in handling the allegation. All conversations and actions shall be documented in writing and maintained by the Pastor (as Chair of the Child Protection Committee) or by the Chair of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) if the allegation(s) involve the Pastor or the Pastor is unavailable.

Documentation pertaining to personnel matters is maintained by the Chair of the SPRC.

2. The Pastor (as Chair of the Child Protection Committee) shall be notified immediately, unless the allegation(s) involve the Pastor. If the allegation(s) involves the Pastor or the Pastor is unavailable, the Chairperson of the SPRC shall be notified immediately, and they shall immediately notify the District Superintendent, who shall direct the next steps taken by the Church in responding to the allegation(s).

5. As many members of the Child Protection Committee as are immediately accessible shall be convened either in person or virtually. 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.

6. The accused shall not be confronted with the allegation(s). If the accused has assigned duties within the life of the Church, the Staff-Parish Relations Committee will act to address and resolve employment issues.

7. 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 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.
- b. 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

8. If deemed not reportable, the Child Protection Committee and the Pastor will notify the district superintendent. The Department of Social Services may be consulted.

9. 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

Additional Considerations:

- Confidentiality shall be observed for both the alleged victim and the accused until advised to the contrary by the Child Protection Committee.
- Unless involved directly, it is appropriate for the Pastor to extend whatever care and resources are necessary to those impacted by the allegation(s). In providing care to the alleged victim, the accused, and their families, discussion of the truth or falsity of the allegation(s) could contaminate the investigation and should be avoided. Blame shall not be assigned, nor steps taken that involve establishing or refuting the allegation(s). Prayer for the church and all persons affected by the allegation shall be encouraged.
- Under no circumstance should any congregational member, staff, or committee member investigate the allegation(s) except as directed by the Pastor, district superintendent, or other legal authority.
- The Pastor, or their designee, shall be a single spokesperson for the Church.

BASIC PROCEDURES FOR SAFE MINISTRY WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH ¹

The “Two Adult Rule”

The “Two Adult Rule” requires that no fewer than two unrelated, adult workers should be present at all times during a church sponsored program, event, or ministry involving children or youth. 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.

¹ Based in part on *Safe Sanctuaries - Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church* by Joy Thornburg Melton, Discipleship Resources. Go to: www.discipleshipresources.org and search for “Safe Sanctuaries.”

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”

People under the age of eighteen may not be workers because they 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.

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. 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.

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. The following guidelines are agreed to by all workers in the Westhampton UMC Child Protection Policy Form:

- 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. Permission to use photographs is provided by the child's parent(s) in the Child Participant Form. Workers should consult with the Church office to determine if approval was given for all individuals in photographs. Tagging individuals must also be approved. Names never accompany photographs of children.
- 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.

Training for All Workers

Before beginning their first year of service, all workers (staff and volunteer) with children and youth will be required to read the Church's Child Protection Policy and complete a form indicating that they have read, understood, and agreed to abide by it. Anyone failing to do so will not be permitted to serve until the Policy has been read and agreed to.

All workers (staff and volunteer) will be required to attend a training session (or view a recorded training: <https://youtu.be/egjbmeGJt0k>) offered by the Church annually on child protection.

Additionally, all paid staff working directly with children and/or youth will be required to complete the online "Child Abuse & Neglect: Recognizing, Reporting, and Responding for Educators" training offered through the Virginia Department of Social Services

https://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/cps/mandated_reporters/cwse5691/story.html. Proof of completion will be submitted to the Church and kept on file with other personnel records.

All paid staff working directly with children and/or youth will be required to be CPR certified. The Church provides first aid and CPR training.

Leaders of community groups of children or youth who use the Church facility, including its outdoor facilities, are required to read this Policy and sign their acknowledgement of it. Church facilities, including outdoor facilities, will not be available to groups whose leaders refuse to read and sign the Policy. Additionally, such groups shall be required to provide proof of insurance coverage satisfactory to the church.

Within 4 months of the adoption of this policy, all existing workers will comply with this section's training requirements to continue in their positions.

Covenants for All Youth Participants and Adult Workers

A written covenant of participation should be provided to all youth participants ([Appendix B](#)) and adult workers ([Appendix A](#)) 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.

Consequences for youth or adults not following the covenant, or other inappropriate behavior (especially by minors during church events), will focus on restoring peace with reconciliation among the parties involved. The goal of resolving each problem will be growth and learning through repentance and forgiveness.

All problems encountered with minors will be handled on a case-by-case basis within the group (and/or with the minor's parents) and by the adult leaders to the extent that this is possible. Should a situation need to be addressed with the youth and/or parents/guardians, the Director of Children and Youth should first consult with their supervisor (the Pastor), and then other church leaders as necessary, to determine how best to address the situation. Should the situation be urgent, the parent/guardian will be contacted immediately and will be responsible for picking up the youth from an event or trip.

Other problems that involve staff or adult workers not following the Worker Covenant, or other inappropriate behavior, may be handled by the SPRC for adult workers and a supervisor for staff workers.

Child Protection Committee

The Charge Conference, upon nomination by the Committee on Nominations and Leadership Development, elects a Child Protection Committee. 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 this Child Protection 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.

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.)

Appendix A: Adult Worker Covenant of Conduct

During the meetings, events, and trips under the sponsorship and guidance of Westhampton UMC, I recognize that I am a representative of the Christian Community and I am responsible for my actions. I understand that by signing this Covenant, I agree to abide by the following expectations:

I Shall:

- Conduct ministry in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all children and youth.
- Be familiar with the current Child Protection Policy in place at Westhampton UMC.
- Report any suspicions of child abuse.
- Demonstrate the love of Jesus so that each child and/or youth will be “surrounded by steadfast love...established in faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal” (United Methodist Hymnal, page 44).
- Recognize that everyone in the group is a part of the body of Christ and embrace inclusiveness by making sure that everyone feels welcome and important.
- Provide a trusting environment for children and/or youth.
- Take the initiative to inform my guests of their responsibility to follow the Youth and Adult Covenant expectations when they visit the group or participate in an event or trip.
- Know the difference between appropriate signs of affection and those that could be interpreted as inappropriate.
- Hold a valid driver’s license and have auto insurance if transporting children and/or youth.
- Never use a cell phone while transporting children and/or youth (unless GPS is needed for directions).
- Refrain from using tobacco products, illegal drugs, and alcohol in the presence of children and/or youth.
- Understand that it is prohibited to provide alcohol or illegal drugs to underaged persons at any time.
- Understand that it is prohibited to be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs while in the presence of children and/or youth.
- Never consume alcohol or illegal drugs within 6 hours of serving with children and/or youth.
- Never consume alcohol or illegal drugs while serving with children and/or youth.
- Respect the property where the ministry event occurs and leave all areas clean.
- Participate fully in all scheduled group activities and provide supervision at all times.

GUIDELINES FOR CONSEQUENCES:

Consequences will focus on restoring peace with reconciliation among the parties involved. The goal of resolving each problem will be growth and learning through repentance and forgiveness. Any problems encountered will be handled with a supervisor (for staff workers) and by the Staff-Parish Relations Committee (for volunteer workers) to the extent that this is possible.

ADULT SIGNATURE:

In signing this covenant, I vow that I have read and understand these guidelines. I recognize that a covenant is a binding promise, and my signature is testimony that I agree to adhere to the provisions of this covenant.

Adult Signature

Date

Appendix B: Youth Covenant of Conduct

During the meetings, events, and trips under the sponsorship and guidance of Westhampton UMC, I recognize that I am a representative of the Christian Community and I am responsible for my actions. I understand that by signing this Covenant, I agree to abide by the following guidelines:

I Shall:

- Recognize that everyone in the group is a part of the body of Christ. I will embrace inclusiveness by making sure that everyone feels welcome and important.
- Respect the physical and emotional well-being of others by “doing unto them as I would have them do unto me.” (This includes refraining from harsh play or violence, refraining from harmful jokes, respecting the need for sleep, etc.)
- Respect the health of my own body by refraining from the use of tobacco, alcohol, and illegal drugs. I understand that the use of these substances is absolutely prohibited.
- Respect the things I use and the property of places I visit. The areas used for all events, including transportation, shall be left clean.
- Participate fully in all scheduled group activities and abide by additional group guidelines made during a special event or trip.
- Act appropriately with others. This means no couples alone at any time, and no public displays of affection.
- Follow all instructions given by group leaders and chaperones without protest. (This does not mean an instruction may not be politely and discreetly questioned if it seems unreasonable).
- Stay within the group or assigned sub-group at all times. I will not wander off alone or leave the activity site unless granted permission by an adult, and I will report for all designated check-in times.
- Hold safety in the highest regard and refrain from compromising my own safety or another’s safety.
- Provide a trusting environment for my peers. When others share something about themselves in a group discussion, I will not repeat that information to other friends outside of the group.
- Take the initiative to inform my guests of their responsibility to follow these guidelines when they visit the group or participate in an event or trip.

GUIDELINES FOR CONSEQUENCES:

Consequences will focus on restoring peace with reconciliation among the parties involved. The goal of resolving each problem will be growth and learning through repentance and forgiveness. Any problems encountered will be handled within the group and by the adult leaders to the extent that this is possible. However, should a situation persist or become uncontrollable, the parent/guardian will be contacted and informed of the problem. Should the situation be urgent, the parent/guardian will be contacted immediately and will be responsible for picking up the youth from an event or trip.

YOUTH AND PARENT/GUARDIAN SIGNATURE:

In signing this covenant, I vow that I have read and understand these guidelines. I recognize that a covenant is a binding promise, and my signature is testimony that I agree to adhere to the provisions of this covenant.

Youth Signature

Date

Parent Initial

Appendix C: Checklist for Response to Allegation of Child Abuse

Section 1: To Be Completed by Person Making the Observation or Receiving the Information

Instructions: 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.

Date: _____	Initial: _____	<p>1. Clergy and paid professional staff: remove the accused from the situation and suspend the accused from duties involving children/youth.</p> <p>Adult volunteers: Remove the accused from the situation and immediately notify the closest available clergy/professional staff person who will suspend the accused from their duties and notify the Pastor. If the clergy/professional staff person to whom the allegation is reported is not the direct supervisor of the accused, the Pastor will inform the supervisor as soon as possible.</p>
Date: _____	Initial: _____	<p>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. This documentation should be provided to the closest available clergy/professional staff person.</p>

Section 2: To Be Completed by Clergy / Professional Staff Persons

Instructions: The procedures after this point will be administered by clergy or professional staff persons only. Date and initial as each step is completed. All documentation and reports should be given to and maintained by the Pastor. Note: If an allegation is against the Pastor, the documentation and reports should go to the chairperson of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee and the District Superintendent.

Date: _____	Initial: _____	<p>1. Immediately notify the Pastor and provide them with written documentation of everything that occurred to this point.</p> <p>If the allegations involve the Pastor or the Pastor is unavailable, the Chairperson of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) shall 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.</p>
Date: _____	Initial: _____	<p>2. Immediately notify the parents/guardians of the alleged victim and respond to their questions and concerns.</p>
Date: _____	Initial: _____	<p>3. Immediately convene the Child Protection Committee to determine whether the incident requires immediate notification of state authorities.</p>
Date: _____	Initial: _____	<p>4. Make written documentation of all persons contacted and action taken to this point, and submit it according to the instructions for this section.</p>
Date: _____	Initial: _____	<p>5. The Pastor may choose to establish a small response team to begin pastoral care process and complete applicable items below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. notify the insurance carrier of the incident immediately and comply with its investigation, if any. b. cooperate with legal and state authorities in their investigations, if any.

		<p>c. prepare a written statement and designate a spokesperson to respond to media inquiries.</p> <p>d. provide assistance to the alleged victim and their 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.</p> <p>e. inform the affected volunteer(s) and paid staff members of the need for confidentiality.</p>
Date: _____	Initial: _____	6. Consider and respond to the concerns of other parents based on guidance from Social Services, the authorities, or the district, while maintaining confidentiality and reserving any judgment.
Date: _____	Initial: _____	7. The director of the affected ministerial area will respond to the pastoral care concerns of persons within the department, when deemed appropriate by the Pastor and/or the SPRC Chairperson.
Date: _____	Initial: _____	8. Make written documentation of persons contacted and action taken, and submit it according to the Instructions for this section.