

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY
First United Methodist Church
New Philadelphia, Ohio
Adopted: September 10, 2001
Revised: August 16, 2010

I. Introduction

People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

Mark 10:13-16

This incident from the ministry of Jesus speaks of the value our Lord placed on children and the example of faith that they provide for the rest of us. As followers of Jesus, we understand that children/youth are inherently valuable members of Christ's community.

Jesus highlighted not only the faith and openness of children, but also their vulnerability. This vulnerability puts children at risk, but it also places them close to God. Their dependence on God may be what Jesus was trying to get his disciples to see as a model for their own faith. This vulnerability and dependence makes the protection and support of the community of faith even more important. Jesus was teaching that, within the community of believers, there must be protection for each of us in our dependence on God and on each other. As followers of Christ, we resolve to protect children in their vulnerability and also to learn from them as we all grow in the faith.

Our culture appears to be experiencing an increase of child abuse and neglect. As much as we do not like to think about abusive and hurtful things happening in the church, it is clear that it is our duty as the Church to guard and protect the children, youth, church staff, and volunteers who participate in our ministries.

The General Conference of The United Methodist Church, in April, 1996 adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child sexual abuse in the church. The adopted resolution includes the following statement:

"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 state 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, exploitation and ritual abuse...occur in churches, both large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural and racial lines. It is real, and it appears to be increasing. Most annual conferences can cite specific incidents of child sexual abuse and exploitation in their churches. Virtually every congregation has among its members adult survivors of early sexual trauma.

Such incidents are devastating to all who are involved: the child, the family, the local church and its leaders. Increasingly, churches are torn apart by the legal, emotional and monetary consequences of litigation following allegations of abuse.

God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from sexual and ritual abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults grow safe and strong."

The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church, 1996, pages 384-386. (Since the 1996 General Conference, every conference in the United States has reported at least one incident of child abuse.)

Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we adopt this policy for the prevention of child abuse in our church.

II. Purpose

The purpose of the Child Protection Policy of the First United Methodist Church is to:

1. Provide procedures specifically designed to protect children, youth, church staff and volunteers associated with the ministries of the church.
2. Establish appropriate ways of responding to alleged, reported, or suspected incidents of abuse.
3. Be in compassionate ministry with all affected persons: the alleged victim, the alleged victim's family, the accused, the accused's family, and the church family.

We hereby resolve to put into practice the procedures set forth herein with the intent to:

4. Safeguard the children/youth of our church from abuse and neglect.
5. Respond to all allegations in a fair and compassionate manner.
6. Protect church staff and volunteers from potential false allegations of abuse.
7. Limit the extent of our church's legal risk and liability.
8. Strengthen our Christian educational children/youth ministries.

PROCEDURES TO SUPPORT THE CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

I. Definition of Abuse

"Child abuse" is defined in accordance with current Ohio law (2001). At the time this policy was being written/adopted, the current law in Ohio defined child abuse to consist 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 in Section 2919.22 of the Ohio Revised Code**; or
3. Denial as a means of punishment, of proper 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.

II. Selection and Screening of Church Staff and Volunteers

Although our Christian concern for children/youth leads us to be saddened when any form of child abuse takes place anywhere, our major policy need is to be certain that abuse does not occur within the framework of any First United Methodist Church program or ministry with children/youth. This policy is intended to help our congregation make First United Methodist Church a truly safe and caring place.

In an effort to create a safe environment within our church, each church staff person and volunteer who works with the church's children/youth programs either regularly or occasionally, on or beyond church grounds, will be screened and will be trained on child protection issues.

The procedure for selecting and screening is as follows (The Staff Parish Relations Committee may set additional screening, such as a police background check, and performance standards for paid staff):

1. Each person being considered to work with children/youth in any church program, whether as a volunteer or paid staff person, shall fill out an application form.
2. Before placing the applicant in a position of responsibility, the pastor, church staff member, or lay person responsible for the ministry will review the written application and determine if the applicant will be interviewed. Indications that an interview must take place include:
 - a. The person has been attending First United Methodist Church for less than 6 months.
 - b. The person wants to work alone.
 - c. The person has indicated that they have been charged with a crime against children or youth. (Persons who have been previously convicted or plead guilty or no contest to a crime against children or youth will NOT be placed in a position involving access to children or youth.)
 - d. Upon checking references, issues are raised which require clarification.

Interviews will follow the interview guidelines provided as an attachment to this policy and be conducted by the pastor, church staff member or layperson responsible for the ministry or through the use of a designated person(s).

The results of the interview, especially when sensitive areas have been discussed, shall be kept confidential and only disclosed to those persons requiring this information in order to make a decision as to whether the applicant should be accepted as a volunteer.

3. References will be contacted at the discretion of the pastor(s), church staff member or lay person responsible for the ministry. A written record of such contact will be retained with the application form.
4. Each person applying to work with children/youth must authorize a Criminal Background Check to be requested of the New Philadelphia Police Department.
5. Before beginning work with either children or youth, each volunteer will sign a statement that they have read and understand and agree to abide by the church's Child Protection Policy.

In the unfortunate situation where it has been determined that an applicant should not work with children/youth, the church will handle such a decision in a confidential manner which is sensitive to that person.

III. Supervision of Children and Youth

Supervision of Classroom Activities

It is preferable that at least two non-related adults be present for all classroom activities involving children and youth. When two non-related adults are not available, a designated person will periodically check the rooms and be aware of the children/youth's whereabouts if they leave the classroom area. Even when two non-related adults are available per classroom, it is advisable to have periodic classroom checks. While recognizing the important role of youth volunteers in children/youth ministries, in an effort to assure a safe environment, all activities involving children and youth will be supervised by at least one person who is at least 18 years of age and at least five years older than those whom they are supervising.

Open Door Policy

Parents, volunteers, or staff of the church may visit and observe the program at any time.

Sign-In/Sign-Out Procedure

Persons responsible for children who are infants through fifth grade will sign in their child and indicate the pre-authorized person(s) to whom the child may be signed out for both Sunday school and other children's activities. No child should ever be left unattended.

Record Retention

All children/youth activities should have a written record of the names of participants and supervisors. Records will be kept for three years.

Supervision of Non-Classroom Activities

- Youth Counseling: In instances of youth counseling where circumstances dictate that counseling is most effective on a one-on-one basis, a church staff person or volunteer may meet individually with a child or youth with the awareness and previous consent of that individual's parent or legal guardian. Exceptions to consent may be made for emergencies.
- Dismissal from Group Events: In group events, it may be inevitable that one child or youth's transportation from the event arrives after all other children/youth's transportation has arrived. In those circumstances, a child/youth may unavoidably be in the individual presence of an adult. Because this circumstance may be simply unavoidable, the general rule which requires this presence of two adults is suspended and the adult is responsible for exercising his/her best judgment for the child/youth's well-being.

Trip and Retreat Supervision

There shall be at least two adults present for all trips, retreats, and other times children/youth gather at or away from the church building. (Please note that at least three adults are preferable so that in the event of an emergency, there will be adequate supervision.)

There shall be at least one adult of each gender present at co-ed overnight events. At single gender overnight events, at least one of the two or more adults will be of the same gender as the children/youth.

In situations where two adults are not available per room where children/youth are staying overnight, then no adult should stay in a specific room with the children/youth. In those circumstances where adults are not staying the rooms with children/youth, special measures should be taken to assure the children/youth's safety and supervision, such as adult hall monitors, "taping" doors, and periodic room checks by two adults of the same gender as being checked. Parents should be made aware of housing accommodations.

Permission slips and medical release forms (including permission for emergency medical care) shall be carried by the person in charge of each trip and/or retreat.

Rules for Providing Transportation for Church Events:

- Driver must be known to the designated leader of the event;
- Driver must be at least 21 years old;
- Driver must have a valid state driver's license for the vehicle being operated;
- Driver must have proof of insurance
- Driver must be accompanied by at least two children/youth; and
- Driver must have read and signed an acknowledgment form indicating that the Policy has been read and will be followed.

IV. Education of Persons who Work with Children and Youth

The church shall provide regularly scheduled training focused on issues of child protection for those working with children and youth. Attendance at this training or a district or conference sponsored training session shall be required of all adults and youth helpers who will have direct contact with children or youth in the church's ministry.

The training may include:

- The definition and recognition of abuse.
- The church's policies on reporting abuse and appropriate forms.
- The purposes of the Policy as protection for children/youth and for church staff/volunteer workers.
- The meaning and importance of confidentiality.
- The maintenance of a positive learning environment, including appropriate discipline and age-level characteristics.
- The appropriate behavior for teachers and leaders.
- First aid and emergency care.

V. Annual Evaluation of Child Protection Policy Implementation

A Child Protection Policy Task Force shall meet once per year to evaluate the implementation of the various requirements of the Child Protection Policy. This task force shall consist of the Pastor(s), Director of Christian Education, Director of Youth Ministry, and any other persons deemed necessary for a proper evaluation. The task force will be responsible for bringing any proposed changes to the Policy to the Church Council.