

John Wesley United Methodist Church

Safe Sanctuaries Policy

for the protection of Children, Youth, Vulnerable Adults*

*For the purposes of this document, unless otherwise stated, the term “child” refers to ages 18 and under.

A vulnerable adult is an individual over the age of 18 who is unable to physically or mentally care for or protect him/herself.

I. Purpose

Jesus plainly taught that children were to be included and provided for within the community of faith. Throughout the history of the Christian church, children have been included in the worship and ministry of the community of faith. Today, the church may be the only place where some children find unconditional love and care they so desperately need to grow, to thrive, and to become faithful people. As Christians, we must take our responsibilities to our children very seriously, always attending to their spiritual growth and nurturing.

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. Child abuse prevention and risk reduction policies and procedures are essential for every congregation, not only for the protection of our children but also for our volunteers and our employed workers with children. As faithful adults, we must do all that we can to create a safe and secure environment for the children in our care. This includes the physical, emotional, and spiritual dangers that may confront them. We acknowledge that religious organizations are not immune to incidents of abuse and misconduct; however, we are committed to the protection of all children and other persons participating in the activities and programs at JWUMC. Abuse, exploitation, or harassment in any form, physical, emotional or sexual, will not be tolerated. As part of our congregation’s baptismal vows, we covenant with each other to take responsibility for the nurture of faith. As such, the members of this church have pledged to uphold one another. In the spirit of Christ, we teach, strengthen, and support the individuals relationship with the church family. As our baptismal vows imply, we also undertake to preserve the integrity of each person within our church family. JWUMC is committed to the safety and sanctity of all children. A well-implemented Safe Sanctuaries Policy not only protects children, but also the adults who serve and minister to children.

This Safe Sanctuaries Policy covers any person employed by or volunteering at JWUMC in any capacity involving children and all outside organizations using JWUMC facilities for child programs.

Therefore, we embrace this policy that puts in place the practices and procedures necessary to keep children free from harm. We also see these practices and procedures as a protection for the adults who have graciously stepped forward to care for the children within our congregation and community. Finally, we endorse all aspects of this policy, realizing that by protecting children, and reducing the possibility of abuse, we are also taking critical steps necessary to protect the entire ministry of our church.

II. Requirements

In order to provide a safe community for children and adults, the church requires all employees and volunteers* working with children to comply with the “**Requirements of Employees and Volunteers**” and the “**Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures**” that make up this Safe Sanctuaries Policy adopted by the Children’s Council, Youth Council, and Church Council of John Wesley United Methodist Church. All employees will be under the supervision of the Early Childhood Center and / or the Nursery Director, as well as their supervisor the Director of Children’s Ministries and the Senior Pastor and Staff Parish Relations Committee of JWUMC. All qualifying volunteers will be under the supervision of the respective program staff persons and appropriate ministry areas.

III. Review

The Children's Council and Youth Council shall receive reports annually from program staff persons and respective ministries as to the effectiveness of this Safe Sanctuaries Policy, shall suggest changes and improvements, and shall report at least annually, or as otherwise required, to Church Council on the status of the policy.

IV. Requirements For Employees and Volunteers:

- All employees and volunteers in a supervisory position should be at least 21 years of age and at least 5 years older than the oldest child participating.
- All employees must complete and sign an application, including references and permission to do a background check.
- All employees will be interviewed by an appropriate staff member (ECC Director, Nursery Supervisor, Director of Children's Ministries, Director of Youth Ministries).
- All employees must successfully complete and maintain training and certification in CPR and First Aid.
- All volunteers must complete and sign an application, including references and permission to do a background check. After the initial application, new volunteers and those volunteers exempt from the application will fill out a Volunteer Short Form to update information every other year or as needed when changes in information occur.
- Reference checks will be conducted on all applicants, employees and volunteers.
- Criminal background checks will be completed on each applicant, employees and volunteers, through IntelliCorp Records, Inc. (NOTE: Background checks will be conducted by a designated staff member; results of background checks will only be shared with those making the decision on whether to place the applicant in a ministry position. Offenses that would keep an applicant from being hired or selected would include, but may not be limited to, all convictions of crimes of violence, abuse or felonies against people, especially children. Background checks will be redone on employees and volunteers every five years.
- All employees and volunteers must attend an orientation / training about this Safe Sanctuaries Policy. These training events will take place at least three times a year with attempts to ensure that scheduling of training is done at times that maximize participation.
- All employees and volunteers must sign and affirm that they have read and understand all policies, including this Safe Sanctuaries Policy, prior to being placed in the position for which they are applying.
- All employees and volunteers must successfully complete training in preventing and responding to childhood sexual abuse. (Stewards of Children). This training or one like it should be renewed every five years or with greater frequency if deemed required by JWUMC. New employees and volunteers must complete the training within 3 months of beginning their work with children.

V. Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures:

A. General Guidelines and Procedures for All Activities Involving Children

- No adult volunteer or employee should be alone with one child. An exception to this policy would be in a situation in which the contact occurs in a public place or in an area where others are able to clearly witness the interaction by being in and out of the area where the employee or volunteer is working with the child. If a situation unexpectedly does not meet this criteria of the policy, the alternatives must be put into place so that the event is in compliance.
- Volunteers and employees must read and receive an orientation about the Safe Sanctuaries Policy of this church, agree to it by completing and signing the appropriate forms and submitting to the background check and training requirements.

- During the first 3 months of service, a new volunteer must serve in conjunction with an established volunteer in Children's Ministries and / or Youth Ministries.
 - Rooms normally occupied by children should have a door with a window. If the door is to be shut, the window cannot be completely covered.
 - Adults should not be alone with children in the restroom; trips to the restroom should be with at least two children. Where possible, the adult should stay in the doorway and not in direct, physical contact with the child. Preschool age children should be accompanied to the restroom by an adult who should wait at the door. (THIS COULD BE THE HALL MONITOR---See below). The child's teacher should be informed of the destination and be aware of the time of exiting and returning to the classroom. Children elementary age and older should choose a same sex buddy to accompany them to the restroom or on any errand in the building. The child's teacher should know their destination and be aware of the time of exiting and returning to the classroom.
 - During programming when classrooms are in use, there should be a Hall Monitor present. The hall monitor will be a designated volunteer.
 - At any event for children, there will be at least one staff member or volunteer trained in CPR/ First Aid.
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- In accordance with this policy section "**Reporting and Responding**," employees and volunteers should report immediately any suspicious or inappropriate behavior that suggests (1) sexual abuse, misconduct, or exploitation, (2) neglect, (3) physical abuse, or (4) emotional abuse. Specific information about abuse and reporting laws are part of the Stewards of Children training required for all volunteers and employees. Copies of information about reporting abuse are available in The Director of Children's Ministries office, and further information about reporting is contained in the "**Reporting and Responding**" section of this policy. Reporters can be kept confidential.
 - For off-site activities, as each facility will be different, it will be the responsibility of the program director / staff member in charge to determine how best to use the facility in compliance with this policy.
 - Overnights / Lock-Ins: Males and females must be segregated during sleeping time. If it is deemed appropriate (depending on ages of children and lodging circumstances) for adults to share accommodations with children, there should be a minimum of two adults and two children, the adults being the same sex as the children being chaperoned present in the rooms. It is recommended that the adults be unrelated. Adults and children will not share the same bed unless related to one another. In Youth Ministry at JWUMC, adults and students attending overnight trips will not be allowed to share rooms under any circumstances, unless that adult and student are related to each other.
 - All volunteers and staff members who drive and / or chaperone on off-site trips involving children should be in conformance with all aspects of the Safe Sanctuaries Policy. All adults who drive children should provide a copy of a valid SC driver's license and an insurance card to the responsible staff person.
 - Employees and volunteers should address behavior that is disruptive with positive verbal instruction defining behavioral expectations and / or time outs. Physical discipline and abusive verbal correction is prohibited.
 - Employees and volunteers should never allow themselves to be involved in situation that could give rise to the perception or appearance of inappropriate behavior.
 - JWUMC has a Disaster Task Force and a Disaster Response Plan. Copies of the plan are located in the the church office and in the offices of the staff members.
 - JWUMC is insured by Southern Mutual Church Insurance.
 - The JWUMC Board of Trustees and appropriate staff members provide regular monitoring of equipment and facilities to ensure adequacy, safety, and good repair. Needs in these areas should be brought the attention of the appropriate staff member or Trustees.

B. Guidelines and Procedures for Non-Church Sponsored Use of the Church Facility :

- Any non-member / outside group or member who is using the facilities for non-church related functions will receive and be required to sign for a copy of this Safe Sanctuaries Policy.
- At the time a contract is made with an outside or non-church group or person or with a member (who is using the facilities for a non-church related function) to use the facility and a key is picked up, it will be the duty of the Church Administrator to distribute a copy of our policy to the outside party and to obtain a dated signature from the responsible party. The policy should be resigned yearly by outside groups using the facilities on an ongoing basis.

C. Guidelines for Staff in Charge of Personnel / Volunteers

- It is the responsibility of the appropriate staff member to give each newly hired employee and each new volunteer a copy of and orientation of the Safe Sanctuaries Policy.
- The appropriate staff member will keep accurate and up to date records of training, background checks, and certification according to this policy on each of his / her employees and volunteers.
- Pastors along with other program staff, Children's Council and Youth Council will review the implementation of the Safe Sanctuaries Policy and report their findings to Church Council annually.

VI. Reporting and Responding to Reports of Suspicious or Inappropriate Activity:

**In all cases, issues of Reporting and Responding must be handled with CONFIDENTIALITY.*

A. Definitions of Child Abuse and Neglect:

According to the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information,

Neglect is failure to provide for a child's basic needs. Neglect may be:

- Physical (e.g., failure to provide necessary food or shelter, or lack of appropriate supervision)
- Medical (e.g., failure to provide necessary medical or mental health treatment)
- Educational (e.g., failure to educate a child or attend to special education needs)
- Emotional (e.g., inattention to a child's emotional needs, failure to provide psychological care, or permitting the child to use alcohol or drugs)

These situations do not always mean a child is neglected. Sometimes cultural values, the standards of care in the community, and poverty may be contributing factors, indicating the family is in need of information and assistance. When a family fails to use information and resources, and the child's safety is at risk, then child welfare intervention may be required.

Physical Abuse is physical injury (ranging from minor bruises to severe fractures or death) as a result of punching, beating, kicking, biting, shaking, throwing, stabbing, choking, hitting (with a hand, stick, strap or other object), burning or otherwise harming a child. Such injury is considered abuse regardless of whether or not the caretaker intended to hurt the child.

Sexual Abuse includes activities by an adult or child or youth such as fondling a child's genitals, penetration, incest, rape, sodomy, indecent exposure, and exploitation through prostitution or the production of pornographic materials. Sexual abuse may also include inappropriate, sexual conversations between the same parties.

Emotional Abuse is a pattern of behavior that impairs a child's emotional development or sense of self-worth. This may include constant criticism, threats, or rejection, as well as withholding love, support, or guidance. Emotional abuse is often difficult to prove and therefore, Child Protective Services may not be able to intervene without evidence of harm to the child. Emotional abuse is almost always present when other forms are identified.

***All abuse or suspected abuse should be reported to the staff person in charge (see below under "Reporting".) Reporter can be kept confidential.**

B. Reporting of suspicious or inappropriate activity:

- In every case the safety of the child or youth should be immediately ensured.
- Suspicious or inappropriate activity brought to the attention of an employee or volunteer must be reported immediately to the appropriate staff person in charge of the event or activity.
- South Carolina law requires that certain members of the JWUMC staff be mandatory reporters, including the pastors, ECC staff and teachers and other church staff. These individuals are required by law to report any known or reasonably suspected reports of child abuse to a local law enforcement agency or Department of Social Services. However, all other adults who serve in ministry with youth and children are strongly encouraged to report abuse if they suspect that it has occurred. JWUMC considers the reporting of suspected abuse a moral and ethical obligation.
- All allegations shall be regarded as serious and will be responded to in a professional manner; due consideration shall be given to the rights and privacy of both the alleged victim and the person being accused.
- Appropriate persons to whom to make this report would be:
 - a. Senior Pastor or Associate Pastor
 - b. Director of Children's Ministries or Director of Youth Ministries
 - c. Early Childhood Center Director
 - d. Nursery Director
- Any employee or volunteer accused of abuse will be removed immediately from contact with children in our church until an investigation by authorities is concluded. The results of the investigation will determine if the person is reinstated or released.

- The person receiving the report of the alleged abuse or suspicious activity shall then document the date, time and circumstances of the alleged incident on an Incident Report Form.
- The appropriate staff member will:
 - a. Notify the child's parent(s) or guardian(s) as appropriate;
 - b. Completely document the report and complete an Incident Report Form, maintain and safely secure and store all documentation of the incident and report;
 - c. Contact the appropriate authorities;
 - d. Notify the church's legal counsel and insurance carrier;
 - e. Determine with legal counsel the appropriate communication necessary to church and media;
 - f. Maintain confidentiality;
 - g. Comply with all state laws and refrain from further investigation of the incident to avoid compromising, interfering with or delaying a legal investigation.
- Should an incident occur involving JWUMC, the official spokesperson for the church will be the Senior Pastor or in cases when he/she is unavailable, there will be designated staff member or church leader.

VII. Policy Violations:

Any employee or volunteer with children and youth that does not follow these policies will be contacted about their behavior and may be terminated from their position immediately.

John Wesley United Methodist Church **Safe Sanctuaries Policy**

I have read, understand, will comply with, and have received a copy of the Safe Sanctuaries Policy of John Wesley United Methodist Church.

Employee / Volunteer Name (please print) _____

Signature _____ Date _____