

WHITESBORO FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH POLICIES & PROCEDURES FOR THE PREVENTION OF CHILDREN & YOUTH ABUSE

STATEMENT OF POLICY:

Whitesboro First United Methodist Church is committed to providing an environment, which is as safe as possible for children and youth that attend the church or any church sponsored programs or activities, and to take the necessary precautions to protect the church, it's volunteers and it's leaders from false accusations or ill suspicions.

Our church leadership recognizes the need to have formal, written policies and guidelines to help prevent the opportunity for, or the appearance of, abuse to a minor. The following procedures are not based on a lack of trust in a particular worker, but instead are designed to protect the entire church body, which includes our preschoolers, children, youth, employees, clergy and volunteers, and allow ministry & growth to flourish in a healthy environment.

“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.”
Mark 10:14-16

“Now it is required that those who have been given trust must prove faithful.”
1 Corinthians 4:2

DEFINITIONS

(for the purpose of this statement only)

- **Child/Youth abuse** means any form of intentional or malicious infliction of injury to the detriment of the physical, moral, or mental well being of a child or youth.
- **Sexual Misconduct/abuse** means any form of sexual conduct that is unlawful; that is contrary to the moral instructions and doctrines of the United Methodist Church; and causes injury to another. It may constitute either sexual abuse, sexual harassment or sexual exploitation.
- **Children** means all persons who are infants through 5th grade.
- **Youth** means all persons who are 6th through 12th grade.
- **Church personnel** refers to all Ministers, Staff members, or other paid employees working on behalf of Whitesboro First United Methodist Church.
- **Activity Director/Coordinator** refers to the person who is in charge of a particular program, either paid or volunteer.
- **Applicant** refers to anyone who desires to be screened to participate as a volunteer in a youth or children's program/activity.
- **Volunteer** refers to any unpaid person engaged in or involved in church activities in which they are entrusted with the care and supervision of children or youth.
 - **Volunteer Candidate** refers to any unpaid person involved in youth or children's activities who has been screened, but who has not yet met the 6 month participation rule. These volunteers are somewhat limited in the level they can participate as a volunteer.
 - **Approved Volunteer** refers to any unpaid person involved in youth or children's activities who has completed the screening process and has been cleared to participate to the fullest extent allowable.
 - **Guest** refers to anyone who has not yet applied for screening or who's screening has not yet been completed, but who may be assisting volunteers in children's or youth activities. Usually this will be for the purpose of meeting ratio requirements, or if a parent simply wants to observe.

WHO WILL BE SCREENED

Screening will include (but may not be limited to) the following persons at Whitesboro First United Methodist Church:

- All Ministers
- Staff members who work directly with children or youth
- All paid employees who come in contact with children or youth
- All volunteers who work with children or youth in any church sponsored program or activity.

All applicants for screening must be 18 years of age or older. Teen aides may assist volunteers, but do not satisfy the two adult rule or ratio requirements. Teens must be supervised by a staff member or approved volunteer at all times.

PROCESS OF SCREENING

Application

An application will be given to any prospective volunteer. In order to be considered to participate in a volunteer position with children or youth, the application must be completed in its entirety and returned to the Department of Children's Ministry, Youth Ministry, or to the Office of the Church Administrator. Applicants will need to read and be familiar with the Whitesboro First United Methodist Church's Safe Sanctuary Policies & Procedures. **All members with children will be encouraged to complete the application process. New members or prospective members interested in volunteering with children or youth will also be encouraged to complete the application as soon as possible.**

6 Month Participation Rule

Participation at Whitesboro FUMC, whether or not the applicant is a member, must be verifiable by church records.

Interview

An applicant may be asked to interview with a director, coordinator, or minister if the person reviewing the application feels it necessary or helpful.

References

All applicants will be asked to provide at least three (3) personal references, which will be verified and documented.

Possible Exceptions to Screening Procedures

Anyone who is well known by the church staff or other ministry leaders, or persons known to work with children or youth in a professional capacity will need to complete the application, but may not be required to undergo an interview or reference checks. However, a criminal background check **MUST** be completed for everyone. Church personnel must also undergo criminal background checks, but do not complete the screening form.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All information obtained through the Screening Form, Reference Checks, Interviews, Criminal Background Check, etc. will be kept confidential in a locked file cabinet in the Office of the Administrator.

Safe Sanctuary Policy for Whitesboro First United Methodist Church Adopted July 22, 2008.

Introduction

Our calling and our mandate is to ensure a safe sanctuary for God's people.

Throughout the gospels, Jesus provides teachings on providing a peaceable kingdom for all of God's people, including our most precious gifts, our children and youth (Matthew 5:9; Luke 18:15-17). The peaceable kingdom begins with sanctuary.

Scriptures provide examples of how sanctuary is to be a community of protective nurture and harmony (Psalms 20:1-2, 27:4-5). As Christians, we are called to create a safe sanctuary in our churches. They must be holy, safe and protective communities for all of God's children, regardless of age or ability. The purpose of this policy is to address the safety of our children and youth at events sponsored by this church. This church recognizes the need to have a formal, written policy with procedures in place:

- to help prevent the opportunity for the occurrence and/or the appearance of abuse of children and youth, and
- to help protect workers from false accusations and/or suspicions.

The following policy and procedures are not based on a lack of trust in workers, but are intended to protect our preschoolers, children, youth, workers, employees, volunteers and the entire church body. Careful and confidential documentation is essential to show compliance with policies, to verify information as needed, and to have an accurate record in the case of an incident.

Scope of Policy

This policy and its provisions shall apply to all persons including all paid and unpaid adults, whether lay or clergy who have any direct or indirect contact with children and youth who participate in any activities or events sponsored by this church.

Supervision

An adult is defined as anyone 18 years of age or older.

A youth assistant is anyone under the age of 18 who may work with children and youth only when supervised by at least two adults over the age of 18 years. Youth assistants cannot be in charge of, nor left alone with children and youth. Background checks on youth under the age of 18 are inaccessible, so choose youth with great care.

To achieve compliance with the Safe Sanctuary policy it may be necessary to combine groups; recruit, train, and reference additional volunteers; or cancel an event. Recognizing that there is safety in numbers, children and youth will be instructed to use the "buddy system," while attending outside functions, such as Six Flags, etc. It is also strongly encouraged that there be present at least one adult who is trained and certified in First Aid and CPR.

Observation of activities in rooms is essential, whether it is done by windows, open doors, glass doors, electronic technology, etc.

For all persons seeking to work with children and/or youth, you shall have at least 6 months membership in this church; or provide a written recommendation from the senior pastor at the church most previously attended; or provide a written recommendation from two current members of this church who have been members at least one year.

Supervision for Nursery/childcare

There shall be a minimum of two (2) adults per room or within line of sight.

Whenever possible State Childcare Minimum Standards must be followed, particularly in relation to the number of adults to child ratio.

Supervision of children and youth

The “2 Adult Rule” shall be observed (2 adults per classroom, 2 adults within line of sight.)

Any one-to-one mentoring or consulting shall be conducted in sight of another adult.

Understanding that there is safety in numbers, one adult can be in contact with multiple you (6th-12th grade) so long as they are in line of sight of other adults. Children shall not be in groups of 2 (“no child on child”) when attending church activities .

Everyone is expected to be present with the group for all activities going on. No permission or opportunity for two children/youth or one adult and one child/youth to separate themselves from the group.

Overnight Accommodations

At events that require overnight accommodations:

When staying in a hotel,(2) adults in the room or if necessary for children/youth to share a room with an adult, adults shall sleep in separate beds from children/youth so long as any one adult shall not be alone with any one child/youth.

Recognizing accommodations may be restrictive in some cases one adult is adequate, so long as any one adult shall NOT be alone with any one-child/youth.

Definitions of Abuse

Verbal Abuse- Any verbal act that humiliates degrades or threatens any child or youth.

Physical Abuse – Any act of omission or an act that endangers a person’s physical or mental health. In the case of child or youth physical abuse, this definition includes any intentional physical injury caused by the individual’s caretaker. Physical abuse may result from punishment that is overly punitive or inappropriate to the individual’s age or condition. In addition, physical abuse may result from purposeful acts that pose serious danger to physical health of a child or youth.

Sexual Abuse – Child or youth sexual abuse is the sexual exploitation or use of same for satisfaction of sexual drives. This includes, but is not limited to: 1) incest, 2) rape, 3) prostitution, 4) romantic involvement with any participant, 5) any sexual intercourse, or sexual conduct with, or fondling of an individual enrolled as a child or youth in sponsored activities of this church, 6) sexualized behavior that communicates sexual interest and/or content (2000

Book of Discipline, ¶161I; 2000 *Book of Resolutions*, pp.135-137; 2004 *Book of Discipline*, ¶162J; 2004 *Book of Resolutions*, pp.223-225). Examples are not limited to: displaying sexually suggestive visual materials, making sexual comments or innuendo about one's own or another person's body, touching another person's body, hair or clothing, touching or rubbing oneself in the presence of another person, kissing, and sexual intercourse.

Screening for Adults

Careful screening is one way to prevent the abuse of children and youth. Screening calls for a careful gathering and review of information in search of those who can provide safe and caring supervision in a safe environment.

- Prior to employment or acceptance as a paid or unpaid adult worker/volunteer, the event leader in charge of an event or program shall direct each prospective applicant to complete the application/consent form. By signing the form, the applicant gives permission to this church to contact references and perform the necessary investigation to complete the review of the application.
- This church is responsible for conducting at least two references for new church members, who wish to participate with the children/youth ministries or new volunteers to the children/youth ministries and a background screening. All persons shall be screened annually.
- If any of the reports raise questions about fitness of the applicant, this church will disapprove the application. This church reserves the right to turn away any persons for service.
- If the applicant (paid or unpaid) is found to have been involved in any activity in which the applicant abused or exploited children or youth, the applicant will not be approved. Any conviction of a crime against children or youth shall disqualify any applicant.
- Results of screens shall be kept confidential. The determination of whether a particular crime is serious enough to result in this church giving a negative recommendation shall be made by this church in its sole discretion. Without in any way limiting those crimes which this church may determine to be serious, these are guidelines:

Persons having a criminal history of any of the following types of offenses shall not be allowed to serve in any ministry with children and youth:

- Child abuse, whether physical, emotional, sexual, or neglectful
- Violent offenses, including murder, rape, assault, domestic violence, etc
- Persons having a Criminal History of DUI or DWI conviction within the five (5) years immediately prior to application shall not be allowed to act as a driver.
- Persons having a Criminal History of a drug related conviction within the five (5) years immediately prior to application shall not be allowed to participate in the event.

Training

This church shall develop and implement training and orientation procedures for all persons (including youth assistants) who work with children and youth. Training shall include this policy, and appropriate discipline, appropriate physical and emotional boundaries, and leader mis-

conduct as described in this policy. No person shall, after this policy becomes effective, have any direct or indirect contact with children and/or youth until they have completed this training program. We recommend that at the beginning of each event a review of this policy be conducted.

The guidelines of these policies and procedures create a status of Safe Sanctuary Certification with this church. Adults thus certified are entrusted with the title “Certified Local Church Safe Sanctuary Worker with Children and Youth.”

Reporting of Incidents

- When an adult leader of an event or activity suspects that abuse or any suspected violation of the Texas Penal Code is taking or has taken place, he or she shall call 911 when needed and report the abuse to the appropriate local law enforcement agency and/or the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (800-252-5400). The adult leader shall contact the administrator or event leader immediately, and cooperate fully with the investigation conducted by law enforcement officials or child protective services.
- Address any needs the child or youth may have, medical or otherwise. Report to the parent (s) and/or legal guardian (s).
- The person suspected of abuse (respondent) shall, for the safety and well being of the children or youth, be removed with dignity from further contact with the children and youth until an appropriate investigation has taken place. The matter shall remain confidential. If the adult event leader is the respondent, then the report should be made to that person’s supervisor.
- Following the report of an incident, the adult event leader, or supervisor in charge shall document the report, and then speak with the alleged victim, being careful to use open-ended questions.
- All such conversations shall be documented. Careful and confidential documentation is essential. The documentation should include the following:
 - The name of the adult leader observing or receiving the disclosure of abuse, including the date, time and place and any action taken by this person.
 - The alleged victim’s name, age, and date of birth.
 - Any statement made by the alleged victim.
 - Name of the respondent, the date, time and place of any conversation or any statement made by the respondent.
 - Any action taken, i.e. suspension of the respondent.
 - Date and time of call to the appropriate agency, name of worker spoken to, content of that conversation and case number assigned.
 - Date and time of call to law enforcement agency, name of officer spoken to and content of that conversation.
 - Date and time of any other contacts made regarding this incident.

Notify the Senior Pastor.

It shall be the goal to provide supportive care to both the victim and the respondent and to restore such persons to wholeness. Supportive care can include the procedures of the criminal justice system, provisions of the current *Book of Discipline*, appropriate counseling referrals and continued pastoral visitation.

Confirmed reports of proven incidents of abuse shall be retained in a confidential file for future screening purposes.

Media Response

The Senior Pastor, District Superintendent Conference Treasurer, the PACT Service Center, Carrier and Bishop shall be informed of all investigations or allegations of abuse. If investigations or allegations of abuse should come to the attention of the media, a response shall come from a designated church spokesperson or a spokesperson in the Conference Communications Office or as designated by the Bishop. Refer all inquires to the spokesperson.

Do not give out any information, simply state that all inquiries will be answered by our spokesperson.

Appropriate Discipline

Children and youth should be made aware that appropriate behavior is expected at all events. Gentle reminders are always necessary when dealing with children and youth. When these reminders don't work, then discipline needs to move to the next step. In cases where behavior has to be addressed, designated event adults should handle it. In no case is physical discipline an appropriate measure to deal with problems. A reasonable response might include a period of "time out" for the child or youth. This should be done with necessary supervision keeping safe sanctuary guidelines in mind.

Keeping parents involved is important. They need to be kept up to date on their child's behavior. For serious offenses, the appropriate response will be to send the child or youth home immediately. Parents and the leaders will help make proper arrangements.

Appropriate Physical and Emotional Boundaries

Physical boundaries are most important in dealing with children and youth. Persons working with children and youth have to understand and respect those boundaries. Obviously these boundaries change as children grow older. A young child sitting in the lap of a caregiver is most appropriate, whereas an older child or youth sitting in an adult's lap would not be acceptable. Hugs and kisses from a toddler to an adult are entirely different than the same from a youth.

Emotional boundaries are also important. As a child grows older it is important for the adult to maintain appropriate boundaries in relationships. It is important for those working with children and youth to not step outside of those lines and allow the younger person to become too attached to them. It is important for the older person to be careful where conversations might lead and to steer clear of inappropriate talk. When an adult recognizes that there might be an issue with these boundaries, great space should be allowed to come between them and the child or youth in question. If that does not solve the problem, then the event leadership should address the issue.

Leader Misconduct

It is a privilege to work with children/youth. Great responsibility is required. Those who violate this policy shall immediately be removed from contact with children and youth and appropriate authorities shall be notified immediately.

Spiritual Boundaries for Safe Sanctuary

As we seek to lead young people in the development of their faith story, it is essential that we guide them and do not manipulate their emotions. This is especially true at longer youth/children's events. The attendees may be exhausted by longer and more active days than they are accustomed to and thereby more susceptible to emotional manipulation. It is therefore necessary that, as we present the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the opportunity to follow Jesus in a life-long journey, we present the invitation with "no-strings-attached." We must allow each person involved to make their own decisions without stigma, coercion, or pressure in any form. As we do this faithfully, we will see more fruitful commitments in the lives of all our participants.

SUMMARY

APPLICATION PROCESS

All adults shall complete an application/consent form. By signing the form, the applicant gives **permission to have references checked and background screening completed by the appropriate authority.**

The application will be processed with all references checked and background screening completed by the company with which the conference has a contract.

All applicants must attend local church Safe Sanctuary training.

REPORTING OF INCIDENTS

If an adult worker/volunteer observes or suspects a violation of the Safe Sanctuary policy, these steps must be taken immediately:

- Address any immediate needs the child or youth may have,
- Report concerns to Safe Sanctuary coordinator,
- Cooperate with leadership and authorities throughout the crisis.

If an adult suspects that abuse or any suspected violation of the Texas Penal Code is taking or has taken place, he or she shall call 911 when needed and report the abuse to the appropriate local law enforcement agency and/or The Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (800-252-5400).