

CHILD AND YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY
First United Methodist Church
Ocala, Florida
August 2009

INTRODUCTION

A central tenet of the Christian faith is the inherent value and worth of all children, youth, and adults. Children and youth are least able to protect themselves in our society and are particularly vulnerable to abuse and neglect. First United Methodist Church (FUMC) enacts this policy to protect the children and youth who participate in the life of this congregation.

We believe that implementing this policy and adopting these procedures puts our faith, which calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to our children and youth, into practice. The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church states that: "...children must be protected from economic, physical, emotional, and sexual exploitation and abuse." Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse and exploitation occurs in churches, large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural and racial lines. God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children, youth and other vulnerable persons from abuse.

I. **Definitions**

- A. **"Child," "Youth" and "Adult"**: For the purposes of this policy, a **"child"** is anyone in the 5th grade or younger. A **"youth"** is anyone not a **"child"** and under the age of 18. An **"adult"** is anyone 18 years of age or older.
- B. **"Paid Staff Person," "Ministry Area Director," "Screened Adult," and "Adult Volunteer"**: A **"paid staff person"** is someone paid by the church and screened. A **"ministry area director"** is someone paid by the church, overseen by the Staff Parish Relations Committee, and screened. A **"screened adult"** is a volunteer who has gone through the screening and training process, and who works on a consistent basis with children and youth. An **"adult volunteer"** is one who has not been screened or trained and shall have minimal contact with children and youth until screened or trained. Any of these persons may or may not be members of the church.
- C. **"Child/Youth Abuse"**: For purposes of this Policy, **child/youth abuse** is defined as any of the following:
 - 1. **Physical Abuse**: Violent non-accidental contact which results in injury. This includes, but is not limited to, striking, biting, or shaking. Injuries include bruises, fracture, cuts, and burns.

2. **Sexual Abuse:** Any form of sexual activity with a child/youth, which can include inappropriate touch, language, and intentional exposure to sexually explicit media, whether at the church, at home, or in any other setting. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent, or another minor.
3. **Emotional and/or Spiritual Abuse:** A pattern of intentional conduct which crushes a child's/youth's spirit and/or attacks his/her self-worth through rejection, threats, terrorizing, isolating, or belittling.
4. **Neglect:** Abuse in which a person endangers a child's/youth's health, safety, or welfare through negligence. Neglect may include withholding food, medical care, education, and even affection and affirmation of the child's/youth's self-worth. Neglect is perhaps the most common form of abuse.

II. Screening and Selection of Church Staff and Adult Volunteers

The appointed clergy and the Staff Parish Relations Committee are charged with the responsibility of developing, implementing and evaluating the process for recruiting, screening, selecting, training and supervising the non-appointive church staff and adult volunteers. The FUMC Preschool operates under the *State and Local Rules and Regulations*, as printed by the Florida State Department of Children and Families, which imposes more stringent legal requirements than this policy.

- A. Adult volunteers who regularly work with the church's children and youth and each paid staff person of the church will be screened.
- B. **The procedures for screening are as follows:**
 1. Fill out application form (Appendix I).
 2. Complete interview, reviewing the written application.
 - a. The Staff Parish Relations Committee interviews paid staff responsible for a ministry/program area.
 - b. The paid staff responsible for a ministry/program area interviews volunteers to be screened in their ministry/program area.
 3. The person/group who conducts the interview **contacts references**. A written record of such contacts will be retained with the application (Appendix II). These may be taken over the phone, faxed, e-mailed, etc.

4. **Complete background check:** The person/group conducting the interview is responsible for running a background check. Each person interviewed who is under consideration to work with children and/or youth will authorize the church to conduct a criminal background check (Appendix III). The screening must include a statewide background check unless the person has not lived in the state of Florida for at least five years. The cost will be incurred by FUMC.
- a. For persons who have not lived in Florida for the past five years, a national background check needs to be conducted.
 - b. If another organization or agency has run a background check on the person within the past five years, that background check may be sufficient if the organization/agency will provide a copy of the clearance directly to the church.
 - c. Background checks are required to be renewed every five years.
 - d. Results of background checks will be sent to the paid staff responsible for the ministry/program area. He or she will report any negative findings to an appointed pastor and they will determine together whether or not to recommend further consideration of the applicant. Judgment and discretion will limit disclosure of any details of a background check. Background checks will be kept on file in a secure area of the church office and will be accessible to the appointed clergy and their administrative assistant.
- C. Before regular church involvement with either children or youth, each paid staff member and volunteer will sign a statement that they have read, understand and agree to abide by this **Child and Youth Protection Policy** (Appendix IV – Participation Covenant).
- D. After the interview and background check have been accomplished, the decision will be made to accept or reject the applicant as a paid staff member or adult volunteer who will work with children and/or youth.
- E. Where it has been determined that an applicant should not work with children and youth, those persons involved with the decision will handle it in a sensitive manner. The appointed clergy will inform the applicant in person. The specific reasons for the decision should be given whenever possible.

III. **Training for Persons Who Work with Children and Youth**

The church will offer quarterly training sessions focusing on current issues of child protection to anyone working with children and youth. Training will be required of all paid staff members and screened volunteers who work consistently with children and/or youth. Each paid staff member and screened volunteers must attend one training session per year to continue working with children or youth.

The training should include:

- A. The definition and recognition of child abuse.
- B. The church's policy and procedures on child abuse and the reasons for having them.
- C. The need to maintain a positive classroom environment, including appropriate discipline and age-level characteristics.
- D. The appropriate behavior for teachers and leaders of child or youth events.
- E. Abuse reporting responsibilities and procedures.
- F. Definition of appropriate interpersonal boundaries.
- G. Medical response procedures.
- H. CPR and First Aid Training.

IV. **Supervision of Children and Youth**

A. General Rules

1. There must be at least two people in any classroom or setting, one of whom must be a screened adult, a paid staff person or a ministry area director (the "Two Adult Rule"). Risk is further reduced if these two persons are not related.
2. A designated person must periodically check each classroom or setting. While not the ideal, this designated "rover" may be considered one of the two adults involved in supervision. When two

adults are not available to stay in the classroom, classroom doors are to remain open, or classrooms must have a window for visibility. The rover must be a screened adult.

3. “Five Years Older Rule” requires that all workers with children, including all volunteers, should be at least five years older than the oldest child he or she is working with.

4. Youth may work with children, as long as they comply with the “Five Years Older Rule” and they are accompanied by at least one screened adult.

B. Supervision of Classroom Activities

1. Infants to 5th Grade: At least one screened adult will be present in any room for all classroom activities involving infants to 5th graders. When feasible there should be two screened adults present and where the two adults are family members, it is preferable that a third adult be present. In addition, a designated person will periodically check each classroom. Two persons in the classroom is the expectation and at least one of them must be a screened adult. Where two adults are not available to supervise, classroom doors are to remain open or classroom doors must have a window for visibility. Children will be escorted to and from bathroom facilities or when otherwise leaving the room by a screened adult from the classroom or by a designated screened adult (Rover) who checks on all classrooms.
2. Grades 6-12: At least one screened adult will be present for all classroom activities. When feasible, there will be two screened adults present and where the two adults are family members, it is preferable that a third adult be present. In addition, a designated person should periodically check each classroom. Two persons in the room is the expectation, at least one of them must be a screened adult. Where two adults are not available to supervise, doors are to remain open or doors must have a window for visibility.

C. Reasonable Ratios Between Adults and Children/Youth

The “Two Adult Rule” should always be encouraged. This is a safety issue as well as to help in handling the children/youth. Ratios differ by age group but as a general rule: 3:1 for children under the age of 3; 5:1 for children between the ages of 3 and 6; 10:1 is a good rule of thumb for the rest. These are guidelines which should give you sensitivity to the number of adults and children/youth together in any one setting.

D. Open Door Policy

Parents, volunteers or staff of the church will be permitted, as reasonableness dictates, to visit and observe all programs and classrooms at any time. The doors of classrooms will not be locked while in use except for doors opening outside that need to be locked for security reasons (without violating fire codes). The doors of unused classrooms must be locked.

E. Sign-in/Sign-out Procedure

Parents with children who are infants through 5th grade must sign in their child upon arrival at any church sponsored program/event. Parents should also indicate the authorized person(s) to whom the child may be signed out. Before a parent or adult is allowed to take a child from a church sponsored program/event, the person named on the sign-in sheet must properly sign out the child. Non-authorized adults will not be permitted to pick up a child. Youth are not permitted to sign out children. Only a designated person over the age of 18 will be allowed to sign out a child from a church sponsored program/event. Youth who are 6th through 12th grade will sign themselves in and out from all church sponsored programs/events.

F. Safety of Classrooms and Ministry Settings

The church will set up a system that keeps children/youth safe on the church campus, paying special attention to areas where activities might be hidden and to areas that might pose physical danger such as traffic areas; maintenance, cleaning, and supply closets and buildings; physical plant repairs; and playground equipment in need of repair.

G. Supervision of Non-Classroom Activities

At least two adults who are screened adults or paid staff persons will be present for all non-classroom activities involving children and/or youth. Any meetings held in an individual's home will be supervised by at least two adults who are screened adults or paid staff members who are not members of the same family. Meetings held in an individual's home must be pre-approved by the child's/youth's parent or guardian.

H. Counseling of Youth and Children

When one-on-one counseling with a child or youth is deemed needed and appropriate, the paid staff person or screened adult acting in the counselor capacity will contact the parent or guardian for permission and will notify another staff person of the time and place for this meeting. At any counseling session with children or youth, the door of the room being used must remain open for the entire session, unless there is glass in the door or a low wall that

gives a clear view into the room. If another adult is not in the building when the counseling occurs, the session must be moved to a public place, such as a restaurant or outside where other people are present. **NOTE 1:** At the initial meeting, the counselor should first determine if he/she is qualified to address the child's/youth's needs effectively. Counseling should be limited to no more than three sessions. Referral to another more qualified counselor should be considered. **NOTE 2:** This is not meant to govern a licensed professional counselor in a paid counseling relationship with a child or youth.

I. Time Following Group Events

Following child/youth group programs/events, it is inevitable that occasionally a child's/youth's transportation arrives after all other participants have departed. In those circumstances, one screened adult may unavoidably supervise a child/youth. Under these circumstances, the general rule requiring the presence of two screened adults is suspended and the screened adult is responsible for exercising his/her best judgment for the participant's well being.

V. Transportation

A. General Rules

Transporting children and youth is an important concern because their safety can be at risk in a variety of ways. Discretion must be used depending upon the event attended, the location of the event, and the age group participating.

B. Requirements

1. For church-owned, conference-insured vehicles, drivers must be at least 25 years of age, must be approved by the Conference Ministry Protection Office, receive training for the vehicle they will be driving, and be known to the designated adult leader of the event. An "approved driver list" will be maintained in the church office.
2. When a child/youth is transported to a church-related event in any private vehicle, the driver must be 21 years of age, provide a copy of a valid driver's license and proof of insurance to the church where it will be kept in that driver's personnel file, and be accompanied by another adult. Either the driver or the adult chaperone must be screened.
3. Drivers must have a valid driver's license for the vehicle being operated. The driver of any vehicle over 15 passengers must have a Commercial Driver's License (CDL) for the vehicle. A copy of the driver's license should be on file at the church.

4. Drivers must require that seat belts be used at all times, and the number of passengers must not exceed the number of seat belts (except in buses that are unequipped with seat belts).
5. Drivers should be advised of a designated route and should not deviate from it except in cases of emergency or road detours. Drivers should have an emergency contact person in place that can help make alternate arrangements in case of breakdowns or emergencies.
6. All drivers will read and sign an acknowledgement form indicating that the church's Child and Youth Protection Policy has been read and will be followed.
7. Drivers will not eat, drink, use cell phones, or text message while driving.
8. Drivers must be in good health and observe all Florida statutes.
9. The non-driving adult must act as a supervisor of children/youth in the vehicle and help maintain a safe and distraction-free environment for the driver.
10. Once youth have arrived and signed in at a church sponsored program/event, they are under the supervision of the paid staff persons and volunteers and will not be permitted to drive other youth, or act as drivers of their own or other vehicles, while participating in that church sponsored program/event.
11. One adult in each vehicle will carry copies of permission slips for all children/youth who are passengers in a vehicle, with signed permission to treat for medical emergency (See Appendix V).
12. When a trip is planned and the destination is 100 miles or more from the point of departure, two weeks' notice must be given the church office to authorize the trip and the driver(s), through the conference's insurance program.

VI. **Trip and Retreat Supervision**

Trip and retreat settings can call for different child/youth protection requirements depending on the circumstances. What follows are requirements and guidelines of this policy. The requirements should always be implemented. Depending on the circumstances of the setting, who is in attendance, etc., some or all of the guidelines should be implemented. Those in charge of the trip or retreat should be mindful of

both requirements and guidelines, in addition to using their own judgment given the circumstances.

A. Requirements

1. There must be at least two screened adults and paid staff persons, **not from the same family**, present for trips, retreats and other events where children and/or youth gather overnight at, or away from, the church campus.
2. There will be at least one screened adult or paid staff person for each gender present at co-ed overnight events. At single gender overnight events, there must be two screened adults of the same gender as the participants. The recommended ratio is one screened adult for every five children/youth. Screened adults must reflect the gender of those attending.
3. All off-site activities must be pre-approved and permission given by the child's/youth's parent or guardian. The person in charge of the children/youth for each overnight trip and/or retreat shall carry parental permission slips including permission for emergency medical care (See Appendix V).

B. Guidelines

In a hotel-type setting, rooms shall be assigned as follows:

1. Rooms are to be adults only and children/youth only; that is, adults and children/youth shall not share a room. At least two children or youth shall be assigned to each room.
2. Assignments should be made to enable an adult room in between two children/youth rooms.
3. Only same gender and adjoining same gender rooms are permitted.
4. Two screened adults of the same gender as those being checked shall make random monitoring hall trips and room checks at night.
5. Select hotels in which the rooms open to the interior of the building and are not open to the outside.

VII. On-line Safety

1. The church will draft, for adoption next year, a policy for web, phone and computer contact between all adult staff persons and volunteers with children and youth. This includes use of e-mail, texting, and Facebook/Myspace/Twitter type communications.
2. Children and youth will only use church computers if they are both monitored by adults and appropriate parental controls have been installed and are active. Church computers that are set up for guests or program participants to access the internet must be in high-traffic public places and monitored by staff at all times.

VIII. Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

A. For emergency situations:

RESPONSE: Call 911 if there is a violent incident taking place or emergency medical care is needed. You will be asked your name and location. (*The church address is 1126 E. Silver Springs Blvd. and the church office address is 40 SE 11th Ave.*)

- ### B. Abuse or suspected abuse of a child or youth by an individual that is *not a paid staff person, ministry area director, or adult volunteer.*
- Such abuse is often disclosed to a pastor, paid staff person, ministry area director or adult volunteer by a child or youth in his/her care. Examples could be suspicious bruising or a verbal report by child/youth of physical or sexual abuse by a parent, stepparent, other relative, or babysitter.

RESPONSE: Report the abuse or the suspected abuse to the Florida Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-962-2873. Further information can be found at www.dcf.state.fl.us/abuse/. Florida law states that any adult working with children or youth is a **mandated reporter** who must report abuse or suspected abuse.

- ### C. Abuse or suspected abuse by a child or youth *by a paid staff person, ministry area director, or adult volunteer:*

RESPONSE:

1. Call the appointed clergy and the ministry area director who oversees the volunteer, who will notify the appropriate authorities, the District Superintendent, and the Office of Ministry Protection (1-800-282-8011 ext. 137).

- a. If the appointed clergy and the ministry area director are not available, the matter should be reported to the District Superintendent, who will notify the appropriate authorities.
 - b. If the accused is a ministry area director, the matter should be reported to the appointed clergy and to the chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee.
 - c. If the accused is an appointed clergyperson or a member of his/her family, the matter should be reported to the District Superintendent, who will notify the appropriate authorities. The District Superintendent will take responsibility and act according to established rules of *The Book of Discipline*.
 - d. If the District Superintendent is not available, the incident should be reported to the Bishop's office in Lakeland (1-800-282-8011 ext. 154).
 - e. Complete the Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse (Appendix VI) and give it to the appointed clergy and ministry area director. The report should be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It should be kept in a secure place. It should be written in ink or typed to prevent it from being changed.
2. Immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the accused, remove the accused from further involvement with children and/or youth. Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the safety of the child or youth is secured, the appointed clergy shall inform the accused that abuse has been reported.
 3. Once you have informed the appointed clergy and the ministry area director, respect the sensitivity of the situation and do not discuss it with others, including other paid staff members, adult volunteers, and parents.

D. Other Issues Relating to Abuse Situations

1. Out of respect for the children or youth, be up front with them about reporting requirements for abuse and do not falsely assure them that all things are confidential.
2. Notify the parents of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety and well being of the child or youth until the parent(s) arrive. **NOTE:** If one or both of the parents is the alleged

abuser, follow the advice of the authorities concerning notification of others.

3. Do not attempt to ask questions of the victim, alleged abuser, or witnesses; pastors and staff members should leave this task to other skilled professionals. Take all allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim's family. Show care and support to help prevent further hurt. Extend whatever pastoral resources are needed. Remember that the care and safety of the victim is the first priority. Respond in a positive and supportive manner to the victim and the victim's family.
4. The church should provide a supportive atmosphere to all those who are affected, offering both objectivity and empathy as it seeks to create a climate in which healing can take place.
5. Keep a written report of the steps taken by the church in response to the reported abuse (Appendix VI).
6. All media must be instructed to contact the Conference Communications Department (1-800-282-8011 ext. 505). Under no circumstances should anyone from the church talk with the media.

IX. **Implementation**

Unless otherwise specifically stated, it shall be the responsibility of the Staff Parish Relations Committee and the appointed clergy to ensure the implementation and ongoing effectiveness of this policy, and to ensure that ongoing training sessions regarding the policy are designed, updated, and implemented.