



Note: This sample is for general guideline use only; some sections may or may not apply to your local church setting. Your church policy should be written to address your local church and community safety issues.

Abuse Prevention

Policy Development Guide

Why Policy Is Important

God has called us to make our ministries safe and to protect our children, youth, and other vulnerable people from abuse and exploitation. God has also called us to create communities of faith where children, youth, and other vulnerable people can be safe and grow strong.

Jesus taught that “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me” (Mark 9:37 NRSV) and “If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones...it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6 NRSV).

The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church state, “...children must be protected from economic, physical, and sexual exploitation and abuse” and “we affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God” (¶161, “Social Principles”).

At each child’s baptism, we affirm our responsibility to their safety by our congregational response, pledging: “With God’s help, we will so order our lives after the example of Christ, that this child, surrounded by steadfast love, may be established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal” (From Baptismal Covenant, Congregational Pledge II, *The Book of Worship*).

Building on these foundations, we recognize that our faith calls us to offer hospitality and protection to all children, youth, and other vulnerable people, as well as volunteers and employees who are committed to ministering with them. Worldwide, child abuse and neglect affect children, youth, and other vulnerable people of every age, ethnicity, and economic group. Often, abuse occurs in places where children, youth, and other vulnerable people feel safe—homes, schools, camps, and even churches. According to a U.S. Health and Human Services recent report, the victim was related to or acquainted with the abuser in more than 90 percent of cases.¹ In light of this, The United Methodist Church and each local United Methodist Church establishes policies and procedures that:

1. lessen the possibility that abuse will happen to children, youth, and other vulnerable people in the church;
2. create a place where victims can feel safe in disclosing abuse;
3. protect volunteers and employees who minister with children, youth, and other vulnerable people; and
4. allow known sexual offenders to safely join in Christian community in the church while protecting the children, youth, and other vulnerable people who are a part of our congregations.

¹ <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/child-maltreatment-2018>

How to Use This Guide

This guide identifies Safe Sanctuaries policy recommendations to protect children, youth, and other vulnerable people; those who share in ministry with them; and known sexual offenders participating as part of our congregations. It is recommended that you use the best practices included in each area to update your local church's Safe Sanctuary policy.

Annually updating and adopting a policy reflective of current expertise is essential to create safe environments where ministry happens. Effective implementation is vital to protect our ministry participants and reduce our risk. Effective policy AND implementation create a respectful, loving setting for ministry.

The following Table of Contents will guide your exploration and work as you update or create Safe Sanctuary policies for your church. Click on the area you want to explore to go there directly or work your way through the entire guide for comprehensive consideration of each aspect that should be included in a complete Safe Sanctuaries policy. The headings used in the Table of Contents reflect elements that should be included in a local church Safe Sanctuary policy. Feel free to use any portion of this guide to build your church's comprehensive policy. That policy should reflect the unique nature of your congregation, ministry, and setting. Your annual conference ministry protection/risk reduction policies can guide you in creating a final version for your unique policy.

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Introduction

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 following is a reflection on the adopted resolution *Book of Resolutions*, 2016 #3084).

A central tenet of the Christian faith is the inherent value and worth of all children, youth, and adults. Children, youth, and other vulnerable people are least able to protect themselves in our society and are particularly vulnerable to abuse and neglect. The United Methodist Church is eager to do all it can to protect the youth, children, and other vulnerable people who participate in the life of this congregation.

We believe implementing a policy and adopting procedures to protect our children, youth, and other vulnerable people recognizes that:

Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to our children, youth, and other vulnerable persons. The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church state, “. . . children must be protected from economic, physical and sexual exploitation and abuse.” The social principles also state, “...all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God.”

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children, youth, and other vulnerable people. Neglect, sexual abuse, and exploitation occur in churches, both large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural, racial, and ethnic lines. God calls us to make our churches safe places and to protect children, youth, and other vulnerable people from abuse.

Abuse prevention and ministry protection policies and procedures are essential for congregations, not only for the protection and safety of our children, youth, and other vulnerable persons, but also for our volunteers and staff working with them.

The Gospel calls us to be engaged in ministry with children, youth, and other vulnerable persons (*Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth*, page 10).

Jesus taught, “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me” (Mark 9:37 NRSV) and “If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones...it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6 NRSV).

We should not allow possible risks to undermine or stop our ministry. Rather, we must:

- Acknowledge the risks and develop a practical plan to address these issues:
- Take steps to prevent harm to our children, youth, and other vulnerable persons; and
- Continue to answer the Gospel’s imperative to be in ministry with children, youth, and other vulnerable persons, thus making a difference in their lives (adapted from *Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth*, page 10.
- Safe Sanctuaries policies and the implementation of practices that reflect those policies seek to fulfill this call for our church.

Definitions

A common set of definitions provides a useful frame of reference for policy development. Churches may have terms specific to their ministry situation indicating the need to modify those listed here or creating their own set of definitions.

Child: In the United States, this term is commonly used to identify anyone age eleven or younger.

Youth: Anyone not a “child” and under the age of eighteen (age of legal majority).

Adult: Anyone who has reached the age of legal majority and has finished high school.

Vulnerable person: A person whose ability to protect himself/herself from violence, abuse, or neglect is significantly impaired through social, physical, or mental disability or illness.

Paid staff person: Someone paid by the church, overseen by the staff/pastor parish relations committee, and screened according to the church’s Safe Sanctuary policy and any additional required personnel screening.

Unscreened adult: Someone who has not been screened. The individual may work in a room with a screened adult or screened paid staff person. He or she should never be alone with children, youth, or other vulnerable people. Unscreened adults may or may not be church members, but they must be regular attendees and active in the church for at least six months. Use of unscreened adults should be exceptions rather than normal practice. *Rare exceptions may be made in consultation with the pastor in charge in special situations.*

Screened adult: A volunteer who has gone through the screening process involving a criminal background check, reference check, interview, and risk reduction training. These people may or may not be members, but they must be regular attendees and active in the church for at least six months.

Youth helpers: People under the age of eighteen who are assisting with child or youth activities. They can assist with activities but should not be considered adult volunteers and should always be supervised. Youth helpers should be at least three years older than the children or youth they are helping. A youth helper will normally be considered “unscreened.”

Roamer: A Safe Sanctuaries trained/screened adult leader who meets the minimum age requirements as defined in this policy and moves throughout the facility to provide additional oversight and supervision during activities.

Ministry supervisor: A screened individual, staff or volunteer, responsible for a particular ministry with oversight of the leaders in that ministry.

Physical abuse: Violent, non-accidental contact that results in injury. This includes, but is not limited to, striking, biting, or shaking. Injuries include bruises, fractures, cuts, and burns.

Sexual abuse: Any form of sexual activity with a child/youth/other vulnerable person, whether at the church, at home, or any other setting. The abuser may be an adult or another minor.

Emotional abuse: A pattern of intentional conduct that crushes a child’s/youth’s/other vulnerable person’s spirit and attacks his/her self-worth through rejection, threats, terrorizing, isolating, or belittling.

Neglect: When a person with responsibility for a child, youth, or other vulnerable person fails to care for that individual’s physical and/or emotional needs.

Selection and Screening of Church Staff and Adult Volunteers

- A. The pastor in charge or his/her designee 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 non-appointive church staff (§ 258.12 *Book of Discipline*, 2016).
- B. All adults who regularly work with the church's children, youth, and other vulnerable people, and each church paid staff person, including clergy, will be screened. Adults who occasionally serve as a second person in a classroom or group and those who work regularly with children/youth/other vulnerable people will be trained on child/youth/other vulnerable people's protection issues prior to beginning their regular involvement with these people.
- C. Screening Procedures
 - 1. Each person being considered to work regularly with children, youth, and/or other vulnerable people, whether as a volunteer or paid staff person, shall fill out a CHILD/YOUTH and OTHER VULNERABLE PEOPLE WORKER SCREENING FORM (See Appendix I). This screening form is good for three years, after which time a rescreening will be necessary.
 - 2. Before placing the applicant in a position of responsibility with children, youth, or other vulnerable people, a designated paid staff member or person charged with specific responsibility will interview the applicant and review the written application. (See INTERVIEW GUIDE for possible questions, Appendix II.)
 - 3. Child Abuse Survivor Applicants

Adult survivors of childhood physical or sexual abuse need the love and acceptance of this church family. A person's experience with abuse and the recovery process may be pertinent to the individual's suitability as a youth, children's or other vulnerable people's ministry worker. Applicants who are survivors of abuse should discuss this in confidence with the person who conducts the confidential interview. If an applicant is uncomfortable doing so, he/she may have the interview conducted by a pastor.

When evaluating candidates, the following factors will be considered if an applicant is a survivor of child abuse:

- A. whether the applicant has previously committed an act of child abuse or molestation (anyone who has maltreated children may not serve in ministry with children, youth, or other vulnerable people);
- B. the extent of professional counseling the applicant has received;
- C. the opinion of references, especially professional counselors who have served the applicant;

- D. the opinion of leaders in other churches or youth organizations in which the applicant has been involved; how closely the church is able to supervise and monitor the position for which the applicant is applying.
- 4. The person conducting this interview will contact the references provided on the screening form and any additional people as the circumstances dictate. A written record of such contacts will be retained with the screening form. (See REFERENCE CHECK RESPONSE FORM, Appendix III).*
- 5. Each person applying to work with children, youth, and/or other vulnerable people shall authorize the church to conduct a criminal background check. **Recommended checks** to be included:
 - a. County-level/multi-county seven-year search
 - b. National criminal background check
 - c. National Sex Offender Registry

Using at least these checks will provide the most comprehensive information. You must get written authorization to run a background check. For people who have not lived in state for at least five years, a national background check/multi-county seven-year search needs to be conducted for each address given by the applicant. (See AUTHORIZATION AND REQUEST FOR CRIMINAL RECORDS CHECK, Appendix IV).*

Before beginning work with children, youth, or other vulnerable people, each paid staff member and volunteer will sign a form stating that he/she has read, understood, and agrees to abide by this Child, Youth, and Other Vulnerable People Protection Policy. (See LEADER COVENANT, Appendix V)

- D. After the interview and background check have been accomplished, the decision will be made to approve or not approve the applicant as a paid staff member or screened adult who will work with youth, children, and/or other vulnerable people.
- E. Where it has been determined that an applicant should not be approved, those people involved with the decision should handle it in a sensitive manner. The pastor in charge or her/his designee should inform the applicant in person. The specific reasons for the decision should be given, whenever possible.*
- F. It is important that all records be kept in a locked cabinet in the pastor in charge's office. There should be a system in place that offers those who need these records appropriate access and a safe place to be stored to assure confidentiality.*
- G. Although not required to accomplish the above tasks personally, the pastor in charge shall be responsible for ensuring compliance with sub-paragraphs (A) through (F) above.

** A number of companies offer online platforms for this process. Some annual conferences have partnered with online platforms and service providers to aid in administration and training. This can increase consistency, provide support where adequate local staffing is not available, and simplify process and record keeping. The steps identified with an "*" would be handled differently in consultation with the platform provider. Please click here to find information about providers currently used by United Methodist annual conferences.*

Training

The pastor in charge or designee and staff parish relations committee shall ensure that regularly scheduled (i.e., at least annual) training focused on foundational and current issues of child protection is available to and received by those working with children, youth, and other vulnerable people. Attendance at this training shall be required prior to involvement in affected areas of ministry by all paid staff members, screened and unscreened adults, and youth helpers who work consistently with children, youth, and/or other vulnerable people.

The training should include*:

- A. The definition and recognition of child abuse. (See “Definitions” above)
- 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/youth events as well as all events including vulnerable people.
- E. Abuse reporting responsibilities and procedures.
- F. Definition of appropriate interpersonal boundaries.

NOTE: A Training Model is included in “Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth,” p. 125.

**If your church uses an online platform for training through a company offering this service, review the training and ensure a supplemental local session is held to educate ministry leaders on topics/issues unique to your ministry setting. While online training can provide convenience and consistency for your staff and volunteers, a local session affirms your leaders and the importance of Safe Sanctuaries for your congregation.*

Supervision

General

1. All activities involving children, youth, and other vulnerable people will be supervised by at least one screened adult and will have at least two leaders present. A designated roamer shall monitor the room when it is not possible to have two leaders present or when one leader is not screened.
2. When reasonably feasible, each room set aside for children/youth should have a door with a window. (Windows in doors tend to remove the opportunities for secrecy and isolation, conditions every child abuser seeks.) Half doors should be considered for toddlers to second-grade children to keep them from wandering outside the classroom. Windows should remain free from obstruction; avoid covering them. If there are no windows in the door, the door should remain open.
3. The “two-person rule” is defined as having at least two unrelated people in any classroom or setting, at least one of which must be a screened adult volunteer or staff person. When the two adults are family members, it is preferable that a third adult be present. When this is not possible, a designated roamer should visit the room regularly. If using a roamer, keep doors open.

Classroom Activities

1. Crib/Toddler to Second Grade

At least one screened adult and a second unscreened adult will be present for all classroom activities involving infants, toddlers, and children in grades K-2. When feasible, there should be two screened adults present; and when the two adults are family members, it is preferable that a third adult be present. In addition, a designated roamer should check each classroom on a regular basis. Two adult leaders in the classroom is the expectation; at least one of them must be a screened adult.

2. Grades 3-5

At least one screened adult and a second adult volunteer will be present for all classroom activities. Two screened adults are preferred. In addition, a designated roamer should check each classroom on a regular basis. Children should be escorted to and from bathroom facilities or when otherwise leaving the room by either one of the adults or by a designated roamer who checks on all classrooms. Where two adults are not available, the classroom doors are to remain open, and a designated roamer should visit the classroom regularly.

3. Grades 6-12

Classroom activities will be led by at least one screened adult with at least two leaders present. A designated roamer shall monitor the room when it is not possible to have two leaders present or if one leader is not screened.

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.

Sign-in/Sign-out Procedure

Adults responsible for children who are infants through toddlers should sign their children in and indicate the names of authorized person(s) to whom the child may be signed out. Adults responsible for children age 2 through second grade should sign their child in and out of Sunday school and other children's activities. Avoid nonauthorized adults picking up children. Older siblings, parents, and other adults may be authorized to pick up children when they are identified on a child's care and information records. This record of authorized adults with pick up privileges should be updated annually.

Supervision of Non-Classroom Activities

At least two screened adults will be present for all non-classroom activities involving children, youth, and/or other vulnerable people. Any meetings held in an individual's home will be supervised by at least one screened adult, with two adults present 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/vulnerable person's parent or guardian.

Counseling of Youth, Children, and Other Vulnerable People

In instances where circumstances dictate that counseling would be most effective on a one-on-one basis, an appropriate paid church staff person may meet individually for one-on-one conversations with the knowledge of at least one other paid staff member and with permission of a parent or guardian. During any one-on-one conversation with children, youth, or other vulnerable people, the door of the room used should remain open for the entire session, unless there is glass in the door or wall that gives a clear view into the room. If another adult is not in the building when the counseling occurs, the session should be moved to a public place, such as a restaurant or outside where other people are present.

NOTE 1: At the initial meeting, the adult should first determine if he/she is qualified to address the child's/youth's/other vulnerable person's needs effectively. Counseling should be limited to no more than three sessions. Referral to another more qualified counselor should always be considered.

NOTE 2: This section is not meant to govern a licensed professional counselor in a paid counseling relationship with a child, youth, or other vulnerable person.

Time Following Group Events

Following group events, it is inevitable that occasionally a child's/youth's/or other vulnerable person's transportation arrives after all other participants have departed. Two screened leaders should be scheduled to be present until all participants have been picked up. In some circumstances, a child/youth/ other vulnerable person may unavoidably be supervised by one screened adult. When this occurs, the screened adult is responsible for exercising his/her best judgment for the participant's well-being as well as his/her own.

Example—Have the parents on the phone with you until they arrive.

Transportation

General Rules

Transporting children, youth, and other vulnerable people is an important concern. Their safety can be at risk in a variety of ways. Therefore, certain discretion must be used depending upon the event attended, the locale of the event, and the age group participating. This policy includes both requirements and guidelines. When feasible, there should be adherence to the recommendations and the guidelines. It is expected that the requirements will always be followed.

Requirements

1. Drivers must be known to the designated screened adult leader of the event.
2. When a child/youth/other vulnerable person is transported in any vehicle, the driver must be either the child's/youth's/other vulnerable person's parent/guardian, a screened adult, or a paid staff person who is at least 21 years old.
3. When a child/youth/other vulnerable person is transported in a church-owned vehicle, the driver must be at least 21 years of age; an exception is made when the driver is a paid staff member who is at least 18 years of age and for whom a motor vehicle record search has been made and the record has been found to be satisfactory by the pastor in charge or his/her designee. (This is subject to other church policy, state law, and insurance regulations.)
4. Drivers must have a valid driver's license for the vehicle being operated. *For example, if driving a church bus, a commercial driver's license is required. A copy of the driver's license should be on file in the church office.*
5. Drivers must require that passengers wear seat belts; the number of passengers must not exceed the number of seat belts.
6. Drivers should be advised of a designated route and should not deviate from it except in cases of emergency or road detours.
7. Drivers should not use cell phones unless required for communication with other drivers. Any use should be hands-free and in accordance with state law. Drivers should not text/message while driving.
8. When there is reason to believe it would not be safe for a youth to ride in a vehicle driven by another youth, the adults responsible should intervene and take reasonable steps to make alternative arrangements for all concerned.
9. When a trip is planned and the destination is expected to be 100 miles or more from the point of departure, drivers are to be listed on an "approved driver list" maintained in the church office.
10. People who regularly drive church-owned vehicles are to be listed on an "approved driver list" maintained in the church office.

11. To be listed on the “approved driver list,” a motor vehicle record search must have been conducted, and the pastor in charge or his/her designee must determine if the record is satisfactory.
12. Drivers will read and sign an acknowledgement form indicating that the Child, Youth, and Other Vulnerable People Protection Policy has been read and will be followed (See Appendix V).

Guidelines

1. Drivers should be accompanied by at least one other adult and more than one youth.
2. Drivers should receive training for any church-owned vehicle being operated.
3. Youth who drive their own vehicles should be reminded regularly of the importance of vehicle safety.
4. Any use of a ride-share service should be scheduled by a parent or guardian and drop-off/pickup confirmed by the parent/guardian with the adult in charge of a specific event or activity.

Trips and Retreats

Trip and retreat settings can call for different child/youth/other vulnerable people 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 as needed. Those in charge of the trip or retreat should be mindful of both requirements and guidelines, in addition to applying their own wisdom to the needs of a given occasion.

Requirements

1. There will be at least two screened adults present for all trips, retreats, and other events where the children, youth, and /or other vulnerable people gather overnight at, or away from, the church campus.
2. There will be at least one screened adult for each gender present at coed overnight events. At single gender overnight events, at least one of the two screened adults present shall be of the same gender as the children/youth/other vulnerable people who are present.
3. The person in charge of youth/children/other vulnerable people for each overnight trip and/or retreat shall carry parental permission forms, including permission for emergency medical care. (See Appendix VI)

Guidelines in a hotel type setting; rooms should be assigned as follows:

1. Separate rooms for adults and child/youth/other vulnerable people (where applicable) should be assigned with at least two participants per room except where specific situations dictate a different arrangement.
2. Assignments should be made so that an adult room is between two children's/youth's/other vulnerable person's rooms.
3. Adults should make random monitoring hall trips and room checks at night. This should be done by two adults of the same gender as those being checked.
4. A hotel should be selected where the rooms open to the interior of the building (i.e., do not open to the outside).

Online Safety

The use of electronics or media communications may be useful tools in supporting child and youth ministries. However, in such circumstances, the following requirements shall be met:

1. The volunteer or staff person shall never initiate a connection (friending, following, etc.) on social media.
2. If a child, youth, or other vulnerable person initiates a connection, that individual's parent or guardian as well as the volunteer or staff member's supervisor shall be notified.
3. If an adult leader receives a private text from a child, youth, or other vulnerable person that seems questionable, the leader should immediately end the conversation in the virtual space and offer opportunities to have the conversation in person and in compliance with the earlier guidelines for one-on-one conversations. The ministry supervisor and/or parent/guardian should be made aware of the incident immediately.

Note: If an in-person meeting is not possible, those involved will determine the most reasonable alternative in compliance with the earlier guidelines for one-on-one conversations.

4. Adult leaders should post photos on social network sites only with prior written permission granted by a parent/guardian. When posted, PHOTOS MUST NOT BE TAGGED with names or location indicators. All photos must be appropriate and in keeping with the spirit of the ministry event.
5. All in-person protection policies apply to online platform meetings like Zoom, Skype, Messenger, and so on. (For example, two unrelated adults should be present in the virtual room just as they would be in a physical room.)
6. All online activities should use the official church account, not a personal account.
7. Communication about online meetings should be shared with parents/guardians as well as with children, youth, and other vulnerable people.
8. Adult leaders and participants should use their real names as usernames.
9. Attendance of online meetings should be documented.
10. All electronic communications shall be documented and retained.

Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

Some form of mandatory reporting is present in every state in the U.S. Voluntary reporting is available in every state. While legal requirements may vary from state to state, the moral mandate to report child abuse or neglect is a requirement for all who care for and lead ministry with children, youth, and other vulnerable people. The pastor in charge or her/his designee should identify applicable laws for the church/ministry based on state and local statutes and include both the substance of the law and the pertinent reporting procedures in their local Safe Sanctuary policy.

- A. Immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the accused, remove the accused from further involvement with children, youth, and/or other vulnerable people. Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the safety of the alleged victim is secured, the pastor in charge or other designated people should inform the accused that abuse has been reported.
- B. If abuse is observed by, disclosed to, or suspected by a volunteer and/or paid staff member of the church, the observer shall report the incident immediately to the ministry supervisor and the pastor in charge. If the pastor in charge is not available or is implicated in the abuse, the matter should be immediately reported to the district superintendent and the proper authorities, as required by state and local law. The district superintendent will take responsibility, acting in accordance with the established rules of *The Book of Discipline* with respect to claims against a pastor. If the district superintendent is not available, the incident should be reported to the bishop's office immediately.
- C. Notify the parents/guardian(s) of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety and wellbeing of the child, youth, or other vulnerable person until the parent(s) or guardian(s) arrive.

NOTE: If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, follow the advice of local authorities concerning notification of others.

- D. 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.
- E. 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.
- F. After having reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the pastor in charge is to report the incident immediately to the district superintendent if he/she has not already done so. If the district superintendent is unavailable, the incident should be reported to the bishop's office.
- G. Keep a written report of the steps taken by the church in response to the reported abuse. (See Child/Youth/Other Vulnerable Person Protection Incident Report Form, Appendix VII). The report should be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It should be kept in a secure place. The report should be written in ink or typed to prevent it from being changed.
- H. Any contact with the media should be handled by the pastor in charge or a pre-determined spokesperson, selected by the pastor in charge or the Staff-Parish Relations Committee.

NOTE 1: The conference communications department is a good source of help when media questions arise. The church spokesperson should generally convey a spirit of concern for the spiritual, physical, and emotional wellbeing of all who are affected and assure that the matter is being diligently and appropriately handled.

NOTE 2: The question that sometimes arises is: “What about confidential communication with a clergy person?” Many states have laws addressing “clergy confidentiality.” Thus, a clergy person may be confronted with the dilemma of discovering or suspecting abuse in the setting of a privileged conversation. While the church has historically placed a high value on clergy keeping such confidences, the 2016 United Methodist Book of Discipline, par. 341.5, provides an exception in cases of suspected child abuse or neglect.

Again, the moral imperative is to do what will best protect children.

Participation of Known Sexual Offenders

An estimated 752,000 people are listed on state sex offender registries in the United States as of fall 2019.² Reasons for being listed on the registry are varied, and each situation is different. As people, created by God, those on the registry need God's love and grace through the ministry of the church. Given the sensitive nature of sex abuse and the mandate for the church to create safe spaces for ministry, special consideration should be given if a church is to safely and effectively include sex offenders in their faith community. See the recommendations below for guidance.

When a registered sex offender requests being a part of the congregation:

- Someone in church leadership should have a conversation with the sex offender's parole officer, if possible, to better understand the offender's situation.
- Likewise, there should be a candid conversation with the offender, so all involved have a clear understanding of the situation and what will be required for participation in the church.
- A representative of the church and the offender will need to agree to a covenant for participation. The covenant should be specific. It should include:
 - A person or group who has agreed to be "participation partner(s)," always accompanying the offender when he/she is present at church activities.
 - Parameters of involvement. *Example—Are there specific services and activities that are available and any that are off limits?*
 - Terms of implementation. These should be in effect immediately and govern ALL interaction during the time the parties are involved in ministry together.
 - Consequences. *What will happen if the covenant is not honored?*
 - A review schedule. The review schedule should initially be one to three months and at least annually thereafter. Exceptions indicating a more frequent review would include response to an incident or a change of leadership (*i.e. church council chair, pastor, "participation partner," etc.*).

If an offender is not willing to agree to the terms of the covenant, your church is not the right fit for him/her. A sample covenant agreement can be found here. You might suggest another church where you know ministry has worked effectively for others in the same situation.

² <https://www.safehome.org/data/registered-sex-offender-stats>

Implementation

Unless otherwise specifically stated, it shall be the responsibility of the staff parish relations committee to implement this policy, to design and conduct future training, and to ensure the ongoing effectiveness of this policy.

Application

All those who participate in the life of this congregation and use its facilities—individuals, organizations, and groups within and outside this congregation—are expected to respect, implement, and adhere to these provisions as a minimum.

Congregational Covenant and Adoption

_____ (CHURCH NAME) United Methodist Church’s purpose for establishing this Child, Youth, and Vulnerable People Protection Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our total and unwavering commitment to the physical wellbeing, emotional safety, and spiritual growth of all our children, youth, and vulnerable people.

We adopt this policy in accordance with the statement we as a congregation make at each baptism that we will “nurture children and youth in the Christian faith and life and include them in our care.” With this policy, we renew our baptismal pledge to “live according to the example of Christ” and surround children, youth, and other vulnerable people with a “community of love and forgiveness, that they may grow in their trust of God, and be thus confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal” (Baptismal Covenant II, *United Methodist Book of Worship*, p.96).

This policy coordinates and supersedes the previous policies used by _____ (CHURCH NAME) UMC.

As a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we are committed to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth all our children, youth, and vulnerable people, as well as all the workers with the children, youth, and vulnerable people. By this policy and its accompanying procedures, we implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events.

- a. Training: We will conduct training on this policy and its procedures to assure that adults involved in children’s, youth’s, and vulnerable people’s activities are aware of these standards and will abide by them.
- b. Screening: All adults and minors above the age of fourteen who have a direct involvement with activities covered by this policy and its procedures will be screened in accordance with _____ (ANNUAL CONFERENCE NAME) Annual Conference policy. All people who are subject to this policy will be rescreened every three (3) years. Any person who was screened but, for whatever reason, has been absent from the _____ (CHURCH NAME) UMC community for more than one (1) year and thereafter returns, will be rescreened.
- c. Supervision: All activities covered by this policy and its procedures will be supervised by the appropriate number of screened adults.

Conclusion

In all our ministries with children, youth, and vulnerable people, _____ (CHURCH NAME) _____
United Methodist Church is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each of God’s children
here will be “surrounded by steadfast love, established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way
that leads to life eternal.”

(“Baptismal Covenant 11,” *United Methodist Hymnal*, p.44.)

This Child, Youth, and Other Vulnerable People Protection Policy is adopted by action of the

_____ of the _____ (CHURCH NAME) _____

United Methodist Church this _____ (DAY) day of _____ (MONTH) _____, _____ (YEAR) .

Appointed clergy and/or supply pastor(s): _____

Chair, Staff Parish Relations Committee: _____

Chair, Church Council: _____

Appendix I

Child/Youth and Other Vulnerable People Protection Worker Screening Form

Full Name: _____

Address: _____

Daytime Phone: _____ Evening Phone: _____

Occupation: _____

Employer: _____

Current Job Responsibilities:

Previous Experience with Children/Youth/Other vulnerable people:

Special Interests, Hobbies, Skills:

Availability to Work? (Check One or More) Days Evenings Weekends

Can you make a one-year commitment? Yes No Do you have your own transportation? Yes No

Why do you want to work with children/youth/other vulnerable people?

What gifts, education, training, or interests do you have that would contribute to our church's work with children/youth/other vulnerable people?

What are your views on appropriate ways to discipline?

Have you ever been charged with, convicted of, or plead guilty to a crime, either a misdemeanor or a felony (including but not limited to drug-related charges, child abuse, or other crimes of violence, theft or serious motor vehicle violations)? Yes No; If yes, please explain below.

Have you ever had to deal with a child abuse situation in any way, including being abused, being accused of abuse, knowing someone who was abused, etc.? Yes No; If yes, please explain below.

Have you read and do you agree to abide by the requirements of the _____ United Methodist Church's Child, Youth, and Vulnerable People Protection Policy? Yes No

SAMPLE

References

Please list three personal references (i.e., people who are not related to you by blood or marriage) and provide a complete address and phone number for each.

Personal Reference

Full Name: _____

Address: _____

Daytime Phone: _____ Evening Phone: _____

Email: _____

Relationship to Applicant: _____

Professional Reference

Full Name: _____

Address: _____

Daytime Phone: _____ Evening Phone: _____

Email: _____

Relationship to Applicant: _____

Professional Reference

Full Name: _____

Address: _____

Daytime Phone: _____ Evening Phone: _____

Email: _____

Relationship to Applicant: _____

Do we have your permission to contact these references as well as anyone else in order to obtain information about you for the purpose of considering you for a position of one who would work with children, youth, and/or other vulnerable people? Yes No

Do we have your permission to share this information with those people who will participate in acting on this application? Yes No

Please share any social media usernames you feel would be helpful in learning more about you or that you would consider linking to participants you would also interact with in a ministry-related capacity:

Platform:

Username:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Do You Have a valid driver's license? Yes No; If Yes, please provide your license number:

Initial here that we have your permission to check and obtain a report of your driving record and to share that information with those people who will act on this application? Yes No

Initials: _____

Date initialed: _____

SSN: _____

Signature of Applicant

Date

Appendix II

Interview Guidelines

There are a number of interview questions that can help in determining the motives behind why people want to work with children/youth/other vulnerable people. Other questions can help identify traits often found in child abusers. By asking questions, keeping notes, and sharing your concerns and thoughts with other interviewers, you may be able to screen out potential abusers in the early stages of the pre-employment/volunteer process.

- ***Tell me about yourself.***

This begins the interview with less threatening, open-ended questions. It allows the candidate some control in what he/she wants to share. The candidate often reveals information in response to this question that you could not or would not think to ask.

- ***Summarize your employment/volunteer history.***

Look for frequent moves, gaps in employment/volunteer service, and reasons for termination/departure.

- ***Tell me about your experiences with children/youth/other vulnerable people. Have you worked or volunteered for other organizations?***

Watch for adults whose lives seem to revolve around spending time with children.

- ***Share with me a favorite family memory.***

Adults raised in abusive households may have issues that they haven't dealt with. The majority of abusers have been abused as children.

- ***What strengths can you bring to this position?***

- ***Why do you want to work with children/youth/other vulnerable people?***

Once again, watch the candidate who is too child-focused or those who want to work with children because they are "pure," "innocent," "trusting," "nonjudgmental," "clean," and so on. Adults should want to work with children because they have something to offer children. Beware of the adult who wants to work with children because children meet their adult needs for control, love, or affection.

- ***What do you do in your spare (leisure) time? What are your hobbies or interests?***

Watch for those who prefer to spend their free time with children and those whose hobbies are more appealing to children than they are to most adults (i.e., excessive video games, emerging social media, models, magic, imaginative roleplay, and so on). Those who have a significant and specific focus of juvenile or child-like interests and hobbies may find serving as a mature leader a greater challenge than adults who have a mixture of juvenile and adult interests. They may also connect very well with children and youth and thrive as a volunteer with other adults for support.

- ***What ages do you prefer to work with?***

Sexual abusers generally have a specific age they prefer. Does the candidate indicate a preference for sex, age, certain traits?

- ***Do you have any reservations about working with children of different ages/abilities?***
Same as above.
- ***Do you think there are any reasons to treat boys and girls differently?***
Listen closely to their reasons or rationale. Does it feel right?
- ***How were you disciplined as a child? How did you feel about this way?***
Watch for families that used physical punishment as a method to resolve problems. Does the candidate have unresolved issues related to his/her upbringing or does the candidate condone this type of discipline?
- ***What do you consider acceptable discipline?***
Watch for the adult who needs to control or those with positive attitudes toward corporal punishment. Listen for signs that the candidate may use psychological abuse to punish. Does the candidate's response indicate that he/she lacks respect for children's thoughts and feelings?
- ***How do you tend to deal with stress?***
Can the candidate recognize when he/she is under stress? Does the candidate have a plan for dealing with stress? Is it acceptable?
- ***What makes you angry? How do you deal with anger?***
Same as above.
- ***If you saw another teacher/staff/volunteer, one you liked and respected, strike a child, what would you do?***
Make sure at some point the candidate plans to tell a ministry supervisor.
- ***Have you ever been reprimanded at work? For what?***
Was the reprimand related to the person's ability to deal with children?
- ***Who are your best friends?***
An adult's best friends should be other adults.
- ***Do you relate better with adults or with children? Why?***
Be cautious of anyone who relates better to children than adults.
- ***How would you react to any accusation of child abuse?***
Watch for a comfort level, a reasonable response, a panic look, a carefully thought out manipulative response.
- ***What would you do if a child told you a secret?***
Make sure the candidate does not make a promise not to tell.
- ***What would you do if a child asked you a question about sex?***
Is the candidate comfortable with the topic? Does he/she share only what the child is asking?

- ***Ask other “what if” questions.***

Watch for a candidate whose responses are consistent with your philosophy, who asks other staff/ volunteers for help and support; one who is a team player. Note how quickly the candidate resorts to punitive punishment and how realistic or honest the responses are.

- ***Ask other interview questions pertinent to the position.***

Be cautious of candidates who seem overly anxious to be hired/approved, those who seem “too smooth,” and those who try to take over the interview.

Appendix III

Reference Check Response Form

Applicant name: _____

Reference name: _____

What is your relationship to the applicant? _____

How long have you known the applicant? _____

How well do you know the applicant? _____

How would you describe the applicant?

How would you describe the applicant's ability to relate to children/youth/other vulnerable people?

How would you describe the applicant's leadership abilities?

How would you describe the applicant's ability to relate to adults?

How would you feel about having the applicant as a volunteer worker with your child, youth, and/or other vulnerable person?

Do you know of any characteristics that would negatively affect the applicant’s ability to work with children, youth, or other vulnerable people? If so, please describe.

Do you have any knowledge that the applicant has ever been charged with or convicted of a crime? If so, please describe.

Please list the names of other people you feel we should contact before making a decision on whether or not the applicant should work with children, youth, or other vulnerable people; and please indicate a means of contacting them.

Please list any other comments you would like to make:

Reference inquiry completed by:

Signature

Date

Thank you very much for your response! You may return this form to:

[Include email or physical address respondent can use if this has not been a live interview.]

Appendix IV

Authorization and Request for Criminal Records Check

I, _____ (APPLICANT NAME), hereby authorize the _____ (CHURCH NAME) United Methodist Church to request any local, state, or federal law enforcement department or agency to release information regarding any record of any investigations, charges or convictions contained in its files, or in any criminal file maintained on me, whether said file is a local, state, or national file, and including but not limited to accusations and convictions for crimes committed, against minors, to the fullest extent permitted by local, state, and federal law. I release any and all law enforcement departments, agencies, and their employees from all liability that may result from any such disclosure made in response to this request. I also give my permission for this information to be shared with those people who will participate in making decisions with respect to my application.

You are authorized to rely upon a photocopy, digital, or fax copy of this document.

Signature of Applicant Date

Print applicant's full name: _____

Date of birth: _____ Place of birth: _____

Social Security number: _____

Driver's license number: _____

State in which license was issued: _____ License expiration date: _____

Request sent to:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Appendix V

Leader Covenant Statement

The congregation of _____ (CHURCH NAME) is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, other vulnerable people, staff, and volunteers who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the church. The following policy statement reflects our congregation's commitment to preserving this church as a holy place of safety and protection for all who would enter and as a place in which all people can experience the love of God through relationships with others.

No adult who has been convicted of child abuse (either sexual abuse, physical abuse, or emotional abuse) should work with children, youth, or other vulnerable people in any church-sponsored activity.

All adults involved with children, youth, or other vulnerable people of our church must have been active participants of the congregation for at least six months before beginning a volunteer assignment.

All adults involved with children, youth, and/or other vulnerable people of our church shall observe the Child, Youth, and Other Vulnerable People Protection Policy at all times.

All adults involved with children, youth, and/or other vulnerable people of our church shall attend regular training and educational events provided by the church to keep volunteers informed of church policies and laws regarding abuse and neglect of children, youth, and other vulnerable people.

All adults involved with children, youth, and/or other vulnerable people of our church shall immediately report to their supervisor any behavior that seems abusive or inappropriate.

Please answer each of the following questions:

1. Do you agree to observe and abide by all church policies regarding working in ministries with children, youth, and other vulnerable people? Yes No
2. I have read this Leader Covenant, and I agree to observe and abide by the policies set forth above.
 Yes No

Signature of Applicant

Date

Appendix VI

Parental Consent and Medical Authorization

Name of child/youth: _____

Grade (if applicable): _____ Age: _____

Address: _____

Name of parent/legal guardian: _____

Daytime Phone: _____ Evening Phone: _____

As the parent (or legal guardian) of: _____ (CHILD/YOUTH'S NAME)

I understand that my child/youth will be participating in a number of activities for the calendar year (YEAR), which carry with them a certain degree of risk. Some of the activities are swimming, boating, hiking, camping, field trips, sports, and other activities that the church may offer. I consent for my child to participate in these activities.

I represent that my child/youth is physically fit and has the necessary skills to safely participate in the activities listed above.

I represent that my child/youth has restrictions on the following particular activities:

I understand and give consent for my child to travel to and from these events in transportation provided by volunteer drivers.

Medical Treatment Authorization

It is my understanding that the church will attempt to notify me in case of a medical emergency involving my child/youth. If the church cannot reach me, then I authorize the church to hire a doctor or health-care professional, and I give my permission to the doctor or other health-care professionals, to provide the medical services deemed necessary. I will pay for any medical expenses so incurred. I will notify the church if I feel there are any health considerations that would prevent my child's/youth's participation in any of the activities listed above.

Allergies or other health considerations:

Insurance Company: _____

Policy/Group #: _____

Signature of Parent or Guardian: _____

Notary Stamp/Seal Date Signature

Appendix VII

Child/Youth/Other Vulnerable Person Protection Incident Report

Reason for report:

Date of incident: _____ Time: _____

Place of incident: _____

Name of reporter: _____ Title: _____

Name(s) of Child(ren)/Youth/Other vulnerable person(s):

Age(s): _____

Briefly describe what happened:

Were there any witnesses? Yes No; If Yes, list.

What action did you take?

Has the incident been resolved? Yes No; If no, explain.

Have the following people been notified?

Pastor Bishop's Office Parent Police SPRC Chairperson

Sheriff District Superintendent Other: _____

Signature of reporter: _____ Date: _____

SAMPLE

Appendix VIII

Emergency Contact Information

Appointed clergy and/or supply pastor(s):

Chairperson of SPRC:

Director of Program Ministries:

Director of Youth Ministries:

District Superintendent:

Local Police Department:

Local Sheriff's Department:

County Child Abuse Reporting:

State Child Abuse Hotline:
