

Safe Sanctuary Policy
University City
United Methodist Church

Purpose

To determine and demonstrate the absolute and unwavering commitment of University City United Methodist Church (UCUMC), to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all children (under 18 years old) and vulnerable adults (i.e., elderly, adults with physical disabilities, and/or adults with intellectual disabilities).

Introduction

"Whoever welcomes a child, welcomes me" (Matthew 18:5). Children are our present and our future, our hope, our teachers, our inspiration. They are full participants in the life of the church and in the realm of God. God calls us to make our churches safe places; protecting children and other vulnerable persons from sexual and ritual abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults grow safe and strong (Excerpts from *The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church: 1996 by the United Methodist Publishing House*). As we engage in ministry, UCUMC must not allow the risks of abuse to undermine or hinder this ministry. To address this challenge, the following steps must be addressed:

- Acknowledging the risks and developing a practical plan to reduce them.
- Taking steps to prevent harm to children, vulnerable adults, staff and volunteers.
- Continuing to answer the imperative to be in ministry with children and vulnerable adults, making a difference in their lives.

The 1998 Volunteers for Children Act amended the National Child Protections Act of 1993 and is specific: if an organization uses employees and/or volunteers who have been previously convicted of a relevant crime, the organization may be held liable under the legal theory of negligent hiring. Further, the same organization with inadequate supervision of childcare can be held liable under the legal theory of negligent supervision.

Any person who may pose a threat to children, youth, or vulnerable adults will be prohibited from working in any capacity with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

Definitions

Physical abuse: Abuse in which a person deliberately and intentionally causes bodily harm to a child or vulnerable adult: (i.e., shaking, kicking, choking, fracturing, burning, etc.)

Emotional abuse: Abuse in which a person exposes a child or vulnerable adult to spoken or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty which may make a child or vulnerable adult feel worthless, unloved and undeserving of love and care.

Neglect: Abuse in which a person endangers a child's or vulnerable adult's health, safety or welfare through negligence, whether it be withholding food, clothing, medical care, education or even affection and affirmation of the individual's self-worth.

Sexual abuse: The sexual exploitation or use of anyone under 18 years of age or a vulnerable adult, through any contact or interaction in which the minor or vulnerable adult is used for the satisfaction of the older person, including both touching and non-touching behaviors.

Touching behaviors: Behaviors including, but not limited to, kissing on the mouth, fondling, intercourse, forcible rape, genital or anal penetration, and oral sex.

Non-touching behaviors: Behaviors including, but not limited to, verbal comments of a sexual nature, display of pornography, obscene telephone **calls or other virtual interactions (via e-mail, social media platforms, texting, instant messaging, video conference platforms)**, exhibitionism and allowing or coercing minors to witness sexual activity.

Minor: Any person between the ages of 0 and 18. A minor may include an 18-year-old still enrolled in high school.

Child or children: Any minor from birth through fifth grade.

Youth: Any minor from sixth through twelfth grade. A youth may include an 18-year-old still enrolled in high school.

Vulnerable adult: Any person 18 years of age or older who is generally perceived as being unable to legally consent, unable to comprehend the nature of certain actions, or susceptible to coercion or abuse. This may include individuals who are mentally or physically disabled and the elderly.

Two Adult Rule: At least two screened and unrelated adults to be present at every function and in each classroom, vehicle, or enclosed area during all activities involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

Rule of Three: In limited circumstances when the Two Adult Rule cannot be implemented, at least three individuals must be present, with at least one being a screened adult employee or volunteer. The Two Adult Rule should be followed at all times for activities or events involving children under the age of five.

Limited Exception Policy: There may be times when one on one interaction between an adult and minor is beneficial or necessary. Limited risk management exceptions to the two adult rule and the rule of three include one on one spiritual counseling and emergencies (ie. Isolating a child for the safety of the child and/or others). Generally, these one-on-one situations should occur in a location where the adult and minor are visible to others and in a limited duration or frequency. A good rule of thumb is 30 minutes for 3-4 sessions.

Policies and Procedures

The following policies and procedures have been set forth by University City United Methodist Church to insure the safety of all children and youth, to protect paid staff and volunteers, and to reduce the liability of the church from allegations of child abuse: To better understand the Policies and Procedures, you should read, "Safe Sanctuaries - Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church," a United Methodist writer's approach to Child Abuse Prevention. The UCUMC policies and procedures are also inclusive of the vulnerable adult population, including the elderly or adults with physical and/or intellectual disabilities.

Selection and Screening

Screening includes the careful gathering and review of information, in search of people who can provide safe and caring supervision in a safe environment. Information gathered includes criminal records checks and the contact of at least two personal references. All screening results will remain confidential.

Paid Staff

All persons employed to serve in any area for children, youth, or vulnerable adult, shall:

- Be at least 18 years of age.
- Complete the employment application. (*UCUMC Employment Application*). By signing this form, the applicant will give UCUMC permission to contact references and to perform any necessary investigation, including contacting appropriate law enforcement agencies.
- Complete a criminal records check permission form provided by UCUMC's Director of Ministry Administration via email.
- Provide 3 personal references. (Include name, phone number and email address.)
- Will be interviewed by at least one member of the Safe Children Task Force.

Volunteer Staff

All volunteers serving in a supervisory capacity for children, youth or vulnerable adult shall:

- Be at least 18 years of age.
- Be a member or participating visitor of UCUMC for a minimum of six (6) months or provide a reference by the UCUMC Weekday School Director.
- Complete a criminal records check permission form provided by UCUMC's Director of Ministry Administration via email.
- Provide 3 personal references. (Include name, phone number and email address.)
- Complete UCUMC *Volunteer Application*.

Volunteer Assistant

All volunteer assistants must be paired with two screened adults (paid or volunteer staff).

- Be at least 13 years of age.
- Attend UCUMC's Safe Sanctuary Policy Training which will be offered monthly.

Safe Children Task Force

This committee is responsible for conducting the personal interview of all applicants for approval/disapproval. This committee will meet periodically to review the church's compliance with this policy. This committee includes:

- Lay Representative(s)
- Board of Stewards Representative(s)
- Staff Representatives
- Others as desired

The committee must consist of both male and female members. If this is not the case, the committee shall select one individual from the Board of Stewards to satisfy this requirement. Findings and reports should be given to the ministerial staff, for review. All information will be retained by the Director of Ministry Administration, in confidential files.

Staff Representatives may include any of the following: the Senior Pastor, the Director of Generational and Serving Ministries, Director of Children and Family Ministries, Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministries, Nursery Coordinator and Weekday School Director.

Education and Training

To reduce the risk of child and vulnerable adult abuse, an on-going program for education and training is essential.

- All new employees and new volunteers shall attend a training session prior to working with our children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

- An annual Safe Sanctuary Recertification will be required for all staff and volunteers. (ucumc.org/forms)

Training sessions are designed to help paid staff and volunteers understand that the policies are in place to protect not only the children, youth and vulnerable adults, but the workers as well.

Sessions shall include, but not be limited to:

- Behaviors that signal problems (What is abuse and how can we recognize it?)
- Guidelines for prevention (What are we doing to keep our children/workers safe?)
- Procedures for reporting alleged abuse (Knowing the legal reporting requirements for N.C.)
- What is considered abuse or "risky" behavior?
- Procedures for response (To the victim, the family, the news media, our insurance agency, the annual conference
- and possibly, to the abuser}
- First Aid instructions (Where are the first aid kits? Where are the defibrillators?)

Paid staff members are first aid certified every 2 years. Volunteers are not required to be certified, but it is recommended that they know basic first aid in case of emergency.

Copies of the training materials will be provided to each attending paid staff or volunteer member.

Basic Prevention Guidelines

All meetings of children, youth and/or vulnerable adult shall be governed by these guidelines:

- Two Adult Rule (see definition page 2), when the two adult rule is not possible the Rule of Three will be applied. (See definition page 2) If rule of three is not possible then the Limited Exceptions Policy applies. (See definition page 2). When the Limited Exceptions Policy applies there must be a window into the room or the door must remain open.
- Any volunteer (staff or assistant) or paid staff working with minors on site at UCUMC must wear a nametag that displays a teddy bear, denoting that they have been through our training session.
- Any volunteer or paid staff accompanying a child, youth, or vulnerable adult needing assistance to the restroom should leave the hallway door open.
- Written, signed, parental permission shall be obtained prior to groups departing the UCUMC premises. No youth should drive from church to any out-of-town/off campus activity. A parent or adult should transport them.
- Unauthorized visitors will not be allowed to remain with the group.
- 5th Grade and under students, without express permissions and supervision, shall not be allowed to leave the designated meeting area. Buddy System-volunteers/staff shall make sure that 6th Grade and above students have a buddy close to their age accompany them if they leave the classroom or activity area, out of the vision of the leaders, so that no child/youth is ever alone in the hallways, church building, or at an outside activity.
- Volunteers or paid staff will not date or have romantic involvement with a minor.
- When on trips, adults shall not share a bed with a child unless the child is their own. On overnight youth or mission trips, there should be at least one male and female adult chaperone.
- There shall be access to a telephone (cell phones always suffice) in all UCUMC buildings.
- No one under the age of 18 will be given supervisory capacity. All those in a supervisory capacity must be at least five years older than those being supervised. Youth (ages

13-17) can participate in children's activities as "assistants" as long as other Safe Sanctuary Policy procedures are followed.

- Volunteers of children, youth, or vulnerable adults should not contact individuals using Snapchat or other social media platforms that have the capability for not retaining communication exchanges. Communication mechanisms, such as GroupMe, that have a logged audit trail are preferred and recommended.
- Virtual meetings should include 2 policy-trained paid staff or volunteers. Virtual meetings should be password protected and limit screen sharing capability for the safety of the participants. All guests should be announced by name.

Discipline

Corporal punishment will never be used for any reason, No individual is to spank, hit, or shake a child, youth or vulnerable adult

Positive discipline measures will be used to redirect and guide behavior. Techniques of behavior management to use will include the following:

1. Positive reinforcement
2. Redirecting students to other areas of the room or to new activities
3. Time out
4. Removal from the classroom/activity area and taken to the parent(s) or appropriate ministry leader.

If levels 3 or 4 of these discipline measures are reached, then parents will be notified.

Procedures for Reporting Alleged Abuse

When a paid staff member or volunteer at a church sponsored program or event, suspects that abuse has taken place, he or she should report the incident immediately to the Senior Pastor, and/or to the Director of Ministry Administration, and/or to another member of the church staff. The person suspected of abuse should, for the safety and well-being of the minor involved, be removed from further contact with the minor until an appropriate investigation has taken place.

1. The adult in charge shall document the incident in writing (*UCUMC 35-7 Reported Incident of Possible Child Abuse*)
2. The Senior Pastor and staff ministry leader in which the incident occurred should be advised in writing.
 - a. If a staff member is the alleged suspect, the report should be made to their supervisor.
 - b. If the Senior Pastor is suspected, the report should be made to the Metro District Superintendent and the Chair of the Board of Stewards.
 - c. NOTE: The matter should be held in strict confidence and must not be discussed with anyone else.
3. If reasonable cause is established, the Pastor/Executive Director shall notify:
 - a. Mecklenburg /Charlotte Department of Human Services
 - b. District Superintendent
 - c. Insurance carrier
 - d. UCUMC attorney
4. All conversations should be documented.
5. The Board of Stewards shall be informed of any incident involving a staff member.
6. Any person who is not found innocent of alleged abuse or molestation shall be removed from work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults at UCUMC.
7. The Senior Pastor and/or chair of Board of Stewards will contact and follow the procedures and protocol outlined by the Metro District Superintendent and/or UCUMC lawyer for all contact with the Press and outside church inquiries. Confidentiality of all

persons shall be scrupulously safeguarded.

8. Notwithstanding the above, any person who has cause to suspect abuse or neglect shall report the said suspicions to the Director of Department of Social Services in the appropriate county pursuant to North Carolina Law (NC General Statute Section 7B-301). Suspect means you have seen signs of abuse or neglect, or the child has made statements to you.

Educating the Congregation and Parents

"Let the little *children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.*" Luke 18:16.

Because our church is a community of faith---a safe haven and sanctuary---where children and youth can be confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to eternal life, it is our obligation as a congregation, to be as current and aware of the variety of educational opportunities that may be provided each year. The following steps include: Congregation and staff:

- Taking the training as a volunteer before volunteering
- Completing *Participation Covenant* Statement yearly
- Agreement to a random background check at any time.

The more a congregation does to encourage openness and honesty in communication, the faster healing and recovery can proceed.

Implementation of this Plan

- Senior Pastor, Director of Generational and Serving Ministries, Director of Children and Family Ministries, Director. of Youth and Young Adult Ministries, Director of Weekday School, Nursery Coordinator and Director of Worship and the Arts, in conjunction with the appropriate committees, are responsible for implementation of this policy.
- The Senior Pastor and/or Chair of the Board of Stewards is responsible for contacting the Metro District Superintendent to follow processes and protocol for any contact with the Press and outside church inquiries.
- All files are to be considered confidential and will be accessible only to those with the need to know as established by the Senior Pastor and/or Chair of the Board of Stewards. SPRC Files will be maintained in the office of the Director of Ministry Administration. This policy shall be reviewed annually by the Safe Children Task Force who will then report any changes or revisions to the Board of Stewards for final approval.

Policy Update	Author/ Created Date	Board of Stewards Approval Date
Existing policy	Safe Sanctuary Task Force/ May 26, 2016	N/A
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy language updated to explicitly include all vulnerable adults (i.e., adults identified as elderly, with physical disabilities and/or with intellectual disabilities) • Add more guidance for virtual interactions and social media platforms • Update Basic Prevention Guidelines • Update all administrative council and SPRC committee references to Board of Stewards 	Brooke Francis on behalf of Safe Sanctuary Task Force/ February 24, 2022	
Policy updates made to meet insurance company requirements and improve processes around volunteer recruiting and approval	Generational Ministries, Liz Rhines, and Kristi Miller on behalf of BoS - revisions submitted for review on 8/26/2023 and 9/21/2023	9/21/2023
Policy updates required by underwriters for insurance.	Kristi Miller with input from insurance broker, Bert Giles, Janice Cloninger, and Shannon Long	11/2/2023

