

I. 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. With this resolution, each congregation was encouraged to develop a Safe Sanctuaries Policy. The following procedures are our response to the General Conference and to demonstrate our commitment to the physical and spiritual safety of all of our children and youth as well as all of the workers with children and youth.

II. DEFINITIONS

Child Abuse - By South Carolina it is any act committed by a person in a position of trust (parent, caregiver, Sunday School teacher, pastor, or other) which harms or threatens to harm a child's welfare, physical spiritual or mental health.

We recognize child abuse may fall into four categories:

Physical Abuse - Inflicting bodily harm to minors constitutes physical abuse. Physical abuse does not always leave visible marks.

2. Sexual Abuse - Any time a minor is used for the sexual stimulation of an adult or older minor, abuse has occurred.
3. Emotional Abuse - Emotional abuse deeply affects a minor's self-esteem by submitting him/her to verbal assault or emotional cruelty. Emotional abuse can include closed confinement, making racial remarks, excessive punishment, use of profanity, knowingly permitting drug or alcohol abuse, ignoring or encouraging peer abuse.
4. Neglect - Not hearing or addressing a minor's basic needs for health, welfare or safety resulting in harm to the minor.
5. Ritual Abuse - Exposing a minor to or making a minor participate in ritual abuse.

III. STANDARDS

A. Minimum Age

The following standards for Authority Figures are designed to separate Authority Figures from the group they are serving by age or enough years to reinforce recognition of the Authority Figure's role.

AUTHORITY FIGURES - the primary leaders of youth and children's activities.

- A) To work with youth (grades 6 and above), the Authority Figure must be a minimum of 21 years of age or 4 years older than the oldest participants.
- B) To work with children (infant - 5th grade), the Authority Figure must be a minimum of 18 years of age.

- 2. **ASSISTANTS** - persons who lend aid to the Authority Figure and Act at the direction of the Authority Figure, including volunteers. All Assistants must be a minimum of 12 years of age and also competent to assist in the activity.

B. Two Adult Rule

Two adults not related or married are to be present during all church sponsored programming with children and youth. All adult/child ratios must be followed (See III.C) Where it is impossible to staff two adults in every room (i.e., Sunday School), an additional adult must serve as a floater with visual and physical access to all areas.

Adults and Authority Figures should take every precaution to avoid being alone with a child or youth in inaccessible areas. This can include, but is not limited to:

An automobile while taking a child home with parental permission only.
A classroom with windowless/locked doors
A cabin at camp

C. Adult to Child Ratios

Nursery/Child Care

An adult is defined as an Authority Figure/Assistant who is also at least

18 years of age. The ratios reflected below are in compliance with the South Carolina Codes.

Infants (non-handicapped and not walking) - 1 adult to 4 Infants

Toddlers (walking, non-handicapped) - 1 adult to 6 toddlers

2 years of age - 1 adult to 7 children

3 years of age - 1 adult to 9 children

4 years of age - 1 adult to 13 children

5 years of age - 1 adult to 16 children

6 years of age and above - 1 adult to 20 children

Mixed Age Groups

6 weeks to 30 months - 1 adult to 5 children

2 to 3 years old - 1 adult to 8 children

2 to 4 years old - 1 adult to 8 children

2 ½ to 3 years old - 1 adult to 9 children

2 ½ to 5 years old - 1 adult to 11 children

3 to 5 years old - 1 adult to 13 children

4 to 5 years old - 1 adult to 16 children

5 to 12 years old - 1 adult to 20 children

2. FUMC Events - These are our preferred ratios. They are meant to be guidelines that will be followed at all possible times.

Grades 1 - 5 - 1 adult to 6 children

Grades 6 & 7 - 1 adult to 7 youth

Grades 7 - 12 - 1 adult to 10 youth

A parent and/or staff person must be present at all events.

Participants with special needs

In the judgment of the staff at the church and in consultation with the parent, the above ratios may be adjusted depending on the nature and degree of a participant's special needs.

D. Travel/Off-Site Policy

Written permission must be obtained from a parent or legal guardian of each child/youth before he/she is permitted to participate in any off-site church-sponsored events, retreats, etc.

Off-site programs, events, and retreats will be supervised by at least the minimum number of unrelated adults (2) required by this policy, but by more, if necessary, when staying overnight. A ratio of one adult to five

children/youth is preferable for overnight events. Gender ratio of adults will be in line with gender ratio of children/youth, as well.

Trip information, including travel destination, emergency contact numbers, names of supervising adults, and departure and return times, must be provided to parents and to the church office before any off-site trip.

With parental consent, children/youth of the same gender and general age may room together without an adult.

An adult may share a room, cabin, tent, or other similar accommodations with children/youth only with at least two or more children/youth. An adult may only share such accommodations with children/youth of the same gender and may not share a bed with a child/youth other than his/her own.

An orientation meeting with parents and children/youth is preferable prior to leaving for overnight trips. During such meetings, behavior covenants and medical release forms will be reviewed and signed by participants.

If travel to any off-site church-sponsored event requires the use of the church van, at least two adults must be present on the van unless an adult follows behind in a separate vehicle.

Personal vehicles are not to be used for the transport of less than two children/youth to off-site church-sponsored events and are only to be used with prior consent from the child/youth's parent or legal guardian.

E. Rooming

With parental consent, children or youth of the same sex may room together without an adult. In situations where adults room with youth or children in a hotel, cabin, tent or other similar situation, there must be two adults that are not related.

F. Six Month Rule

All adult volunteer authority figures involved with children or youth of our church must have been members of the congregation for at least six months before being the adult in charge of an event/outing.

G. Policy Instruction

All volunteers and paid staff are required to attend policy instruction before working with children and youth. A volunteer can serve as an assistant only if they have not attended training.

IV. SCREENING PROCEDURES

An essential component of preventing abuse is careful screening. It will be the responsibility of the Safe Sanctuaries Board and the Senior Pastor to ensure compliance.

The following steps are used for screening volunteer and paid applicants:

A. Complete an application form.

A completed application form will be required for Authority Figures, Assistants and all Employees and will be kept on file.

B. Conduct an interview with applicants.

An interview will be conducted with all applicants. The interviewer should not ask for information about marital status or handicapping conditions as stated in Federal/State discrimination guidelines. The interviewer should also be sensitive to age and sex discrimination guidelines. However, adequate information may be requested to ensure compliance with this policy's minimum standards. The interviewer should be aware of red flags. If issues arise during the interview, the interviewer may depart from the set of prepared questions to explore the issues.

C. Complete reference checks.

A minimum of two references must be contacted on all applicants with one being from their former church.

D. Complete background checks.

Background checks include, but are not limited to:

- Criminal histories
- Motor vehicle record
- Registered sexual offenders.

The background checks will be initiated by the Senior Minister and Chairperson of the Interview Committee.

E. Federal and State Law

This policy is subject to all Federal and/or State laws relating to employment and child abuse.

V. Reporting Abuse/Alleged Abuse

All reports of suspected child abuse must be taken seriously. In the event the victim feels uncomfortable reporting to the Senior Pastor or if the suspected abuse involves the Senior Pastor, reports may also be made to the Staff Parish Relations Chairperson (SPRC). The Senior Pastor and/or the SPRC are responsible for reporting the suspected abuse to the Department of Human Services. If the abuse reported has taken place within the church or the perpetrator is a church member or employee, the Senior Pastor and/or SPRC shall also report the suspected abuse to the District Superintendent.

VI. Investigation

Upon receiving a report of suspected abuse, the Senior Pastor and/or SPRC shall obtain the following information:

Names, ages, addresses and telephone numbers of both the accused and the abused

The nature of the alleged abuse, with dates where possible.

The factual details of the report

The name of the person making the report and the date that the information was received.

The Senior Pastor and/or SPRC shall conduct or direct an investigation into the suspected abuse in conjunction with the Safe Sanctuaries Board. Interim measures may be taken during the investigation to safeguard the potential victim or victims. At the conclusion of the investigation, appropriate actions shall be taken. Depending upon the findings, this may include termination of employment.

VII. SAFE SANCTUARIES BOARD

The Safe Sanctuaries Board will consist of 3 members--one from the Children's Council, one from the Youth Council, and one at large member from the Council of Ministries Committee. Members will serve for two years at a time.

The responsibilities of the Board will include:
Educating Authority Figures, Assistants and all Employees about the policy.
Answering questions about the policy.

Ensuring compliance with the policy.
Granting exceptions to the policy, in appropriate circumstances.
Assisting, as needed, with investigations.
Reviewing and renewing policy annually or as needed.
Evaluating board function.
Other duties as needed.