

## Child and Youth Protection Policy

- I. **PURPOSE.** Spirit and Life United Methodist Church seeks to establish reasonable procedures to reduce the risk of physical, emotional and sexual abuse of children as they participate in church ministries and to protect staff and volunteers from false allegations of misconduct.
- II. **BIBLICAL FOUNDATION.** Jesus teaches us explicitly that young persons have the right and the keys to the Kingdom of God. He demonstrated this through blessing and touch and nearness to children. In Matthew 19:14 Jesus said, “Let the children come to me.” Our goal in response to this Biblical mandate is to maintain a safe, secure and loving place where children may grow.
- III. **RECRUITING, SCREENING, AND HIRING WORKERS.** It is critical that this policy include comprehensive and appropriate procedures for recruiting, screening and hiring individuals who will work with children and youth. These procedures are vital to ensure the control and security necessary for assuring the safety of children and youth. The policy first enumerates procedures for employees/volunteers who work with children and youth on a regular and frequent basis. Procedures are then listed for workers who are only involved with children on an occasional basis.

These policies and sample forms are enumerated in great detail in Chapter Two of the book *Safe Sanctuaries* by Joy Thornburg Melton and a copy of this book is on file in the Spirit and Life Church office. It is recommended that administrators and church individuals responsible for hiring peruse this chapter in great detail. The forms cited in the chapter are samples that may be modified to comply with the church’s child and youth protection policy and county and state protection laws.

- IV. **REDUCING THE RISK OF CHILD ABUSE.** In an effort to create the safest possible environment within Spirit and Life United Methodist Church, several abuse prevention measures will be utilized. These measures include screening of paid and volunteer workers for past child abuse convictions by criminal history background checks, provision for regular training on child abuse issues for paid and volunteer workers, use of the Two Adult Rule, standards of appropriate classroom discipline and open classrooms.
  - A. **Six Month Rule:** Spirit and Life United Methodist Church will not allow anyone to serve as a volunteer leader for children or youth ministries in the church unless such person has had continuous active involvement in the church for at least six months.
  - B. **Staff Screening:** Before beginning the first year of service, each paid or volunteer leader for children or youth ministries, children or youth teacher, child care worker, or youth worker will be asked to sign a statement indicating that he or she has never been convicted of child abuse or a violent crime nor had such a conviction expunged. Also, the screening form will ask for the following: general information, criminal convictions, prior church membership, prior church volunteer work, and prior experience with children or youth. Anyone who has had a child abuse conviction or violent crime conviction as well as anyone refusing to sign the statement will not be permitted to work with children or youth at Spirit and Life United Methodist Church. Each applicant will also undergo a multi-state criminal record check. The church will cover the cost of these checks.

Persons with substance abuse convictions or any other prior convictions not including violent crimes or child abuse will be reviewed on a case by case basis. The final decision will be left to the discretion of Spirit and Life United Methodist Church leadership. Within three months of the adoption of this policy, all existing leaders and workers with children and youth will comply with this paragraph in order to continue in their positions. The senior pastor or his or her appointee will maintain these records in a safe and confidential file at Spirit and Life United Methodist Church. The criminal record checks will be updated every two years.

- C. **Staff and Volunteer Training:** Before beginning their service, all paid and volunteer leaders for children or youth ministries, children and youth teachers, child care workers, and youth workers will be required to complete an approved classroom training. They will also be required to read the church's Child and Youth Protection Policy and the Safe Sanctuaries Covenant Statement and sign a form indicating that they have read and understand both policies and agree to abide by them. The training must be repeated every two years.
- D. **Two Adult Rule:** Leaders will be assigned in teams of two or more for all children or youth activities. No individual under the age of eighteen will be in a leadership position in the church's child or youth programs. If two of these leaders are related adults age eighteen or older, they must have another unrelated adult with them. This unrelated adult must also have a current background check as well as current child protection training. The adult leaders must be at least five years older than the children and youth they are with. If the group is divided, each subgroup will have two such leaders. If there are not two leaders available for each group, then either the group will be combined with another group to make possible the presence of two leaders, visual access must be obtainable to the group by other adults present, or the activity will be cancelled on that occasion. If a church sponsored group goes out, two or more qualified leaders must be present and, if the group is mixed in gender, must include at least one male and one female who are not related.
- E. **Staff-to-Child Ratio Requirements:** The following ratios of staff (paid or volunteer) are required wherever Spirit and Life United Methodist Church children are:
1. Newborn to 16-months old: one staff member for every four children.
  2. 16-months to 2-years old: one staff member for every five children.
  3. 2-years old: one staff member for every eight children.
  4. 3-years to 5-years old: one staff member for every ten children.
  5. Public school aged children: one staff member for every eighteen children.
- F. **One-on-One Mentoring or Consultation:** All one-on-one mentoring or consultation between an adult and a child will be conducted in a room or area that is in plain view of others with people present.
- G. **Classroom Discipline:** All leaders and workers with children and youth will use the following discipline measures. If a child is behaving inappropriately, the leader or worker will tell the child specifically what he or she is doing that is not acceptable and state what the expected behavior is. For example, "We do not throw blocks. We use blocks for building." If this measure is not effective, the child will be guided to another activity. If inappropriate behavior continues, the child may be placed at a table to work alone away from the other children. If the child's disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, the child may be taken to the Children's Ministry Director or the primary leader for the activity and left in his or her supervision. No physical punishment or verbal abuse (such as ridicule) are to be used at any time. If isolating the child within the classroom or removal of the child from the room becomes necessary, the situation will be discussed with the child's parent or guardian as soon as possible. An incident report should be filled out by the leader and signed by a parent or guardian. This report should then be given to the overall child or youth leader onsite to be filed.
- H. **Open Classrooms:** Classrooms or child care rooms may be visited without prior notice by church staff or volunteers, parents, Church Council members or visitors at any time. Brief observations of child care rooms and classrooms of children or youth are to be conducted by the Children Ministry Director or the Youth Ministry Director or the primary leader onsite during all activities.

- I. **Bathroom Visits/Diaper Changes**
1. **Nursery:** A pager system will be employed for all children signed in to Spirit and Life Nursery. Parents will be paged when a child needs to visit the bathroom or have a diaper change. Parents will oversee all bathroom visits and diaper changes. Staff and volunteers will not accompany children to the bathroom or change diapers.
  2. **Children's Ministry:** Spirit & Life will use a telephone text messaging system to contact parents of children needing bathroom breaks or other assistance. When Children are signed into the Children's Ministry activity, the parents will be asked for a cell phone contact number (if available). This number will be entered into the Children's Ministry cell phone Contacts. Parents will be asked to ensure their child(ren) visit the restroom before the start of Children's Ministry activities. Only in the case of an emergency situation, or if a child's parent does not respond to the cell text message, will the Spirit and Life Staff be authorized to escort a child to the bathroom. In this case, the 2-person rule will be enforced.
- J. **Video Monitoring:** Spirit and Life Children's Ministry staff and leaders may choose to employ video monitoring devices at their discretion. A diaper changing station will be available for parents to use and no cameras will be used there.
- K. **Unsupervised Children:** Spirit and Life staff, leaders, and volunteers will make every effort to return unsupervised children to their parents or guardians. Children are to be supervised at all times by either parents or church staff or volunteers. Children may not be in the fellowship area or bathrooms without parental supervision.
- L. **Parents Onsite:** When Spirit and Life childcare or Children's Ministry activities or events take place, parents or guardians will be on the same premises at all times.
- M. **Staff, Volunteers, Caregivers:** All staff and volunteers and caregivers will meet the 6 month rule, turn in a completed application that will be used to check references and conduct a background check, pass a background check, and attend a Protecting God's Children class at least every other year.
- N. **Applicability:** This Policy (and subsequent revisions) is effective immediately upon Church Council approval. This Policy will apply to all functions, events, or activities lead by, sponsored by, or held on behalf of Spirit and Life church, for which the provision of Child Care is specifically stated (i.e. "Child Care is provided."). For any Spirit and Life Church function, event, or activity not providing Child Care (i.e. "Child Care is not provided."), the safety and care of children remain the responsibility of each child's parents/guardians. Leaders, planners, and coordinators will request and pre-arrange the provision of Child Care with either the Director of Operations, The Church Council, or the Pastor.
- V. **DEFINITION OF CHILD ABUSE IN VIRGINIA STATUES:** Section 63.2-100 of the Code of Virginia, in part, defines an abused child as one who is less than eighteen years of age:
- A. Whose parent or other person responsible for his or her care creates or inflicts, threatens to create or inflict, or allows to be created or inflicted upon such child a physical or mental injury by other than accidental means or creates a substantial risk of death, disfigurement, or impairment of bodily or mental functions; including but not limited to, a child who is with his or her parent or other person responsible for his or her care either (i) during the manufacture or attempted manufacture of a Schedule I or II controlled substance, or (ii) during the unlawful sale of such substance by that child's parent or other person responsible for his or her care, where such manufacture or attempted manufacture or unlawful sale would constitute a felony violation.

- B. Whose parent or other person responsible for his or her care neglects or refuses to provide care necessary for his or her health. However, no child who in good faith is under treatment solely by spiritual means through prayer in accordance with the tenets and practices of a recognized church or religious denomination shall for that reason alone be considered to be an abused or neglected child.
- C. Whose parent or other person responsible for his or her care abandons such child.
- D. Whose parent or other person responsible for his or her care commits or allows to be committed any act of sexual exploitation or any sexual act upon a child in violation of the law.
- E. Who is without parental care or guardianship caused by the unreasonable absence or the mental or physical incapacity of the child's parent, guardian, legal custodian or other person standing in loco parentis; or
- F. Whose parent or other person responsible for his or her care creates a substantial risk of physical or mental injury by knowingly leaving the child alone in the same building with a person to whom the child is not related by blood or marriage and who the parent or other person responsible for his or her care knows has been convicted of an offense against a minor for which registration is required as a violent sexual offender.

## VI. TYPES OF CHILD ABUSE

- A. **Definition.** Child abuse refers to an act committed by a parent, care giver or person in a position of trust (even though he/she may not care for the child on a daily basis) which is not accidental and which harms or threatens to harm a child's physical or mental health or welfare. The following definitions are extrapolated from the Virginia Department of Social Services.

### B. Types of Abuse

1. Physical Abuse: Any non-accidental physical injury regardless of intent, threat of injury or creation of a real and significant danger of substantial risk of death, disfigurement, or impairment of bodily or mental functions.
2. Physical Neglect: The failure to provide food, clothing, shelter or supervision of a child if the child's health or safety is endangered.
3. Sexual Abuse: Any sexual activity between adult and child (or older child) done for adult's sexual gratification or financial benefit as defined in the code of Virginia.
4. Medical Neglect: Refusal or failure by a caretaker to obtain and/or follow through with a complete regimen of medical, mental or dental care for a condition, which if untreated, could result in illness or developmental delays.
5. Failure to Thrive: A syndrome of infancy or early childhood which is characterized by growth failure, signs of severe malnutrition and variable degrees of developmental retardation.
6. Mental Abuse/Neglect: A pattern of acts or omissions by the caretaker which result in harm to a child's psychological or emotional health or development.
7. Educational Neglect: The child's caretaker is directly responsible for the failure of the child to attend school or an approved alternative program of study.
8. Bizarre Discipline: Any actions in which the caretaker uses eccentric, irrational or grossly inappropriate procedures or devices to modify the child's behavior.

## VII. PROCEDURES FOR REPORTING INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR OR ABUSE OR BEHAVIOR GIVING RISE TO A SUSPICION OF ABUSE OR NEGLECT

Generally those who observe others' inappropriate behavior are frequently very troubled by what they have seen and often have questions regarding the appropriate course of action to take. These procedures are designed to:

1. Provide reassurance to those who have observed such behavior by setting forth the appropriate actions to be taken;
  2. Establish courses of action that are in accordance with the Statutes of the Commonwealth of Virginia; and
  3. Ensure that these actions are consistent with the notification requirements promulgated by the 1992 General conference of the United Methodist Church and the Virginia Annual conference Policy on Sexual Misconduct.
- A. **Statutory Obligation to Report.** In Virginia “teachers or other persons employed in a public or private school, kindergarten, or nursery school are required to report immediately a suspected instance of child abuse or neglect. The report should be made to the local department of the county or city wherein the child resides or wherein the abuse or neglect is believed to have occurred or to the Department of Social Services toll-free child abuse and neglect hotline.”

In addition, although not required by law, anyone else who knows or reasonably suspects an instance of child abuse or neglect should report such suspected child abuse, neglect or exploitation immediately. All reports of child abuse are confidential. The person making such a report cannot be held liable for making the report, unless it is proven that the person acted in bad faith or with malicious intent. In an emergency the first call is to 911.

- B. **Reasonable Suspicion.** Teachers and other persons employed in a public or private school, kindergarten, or nursery school, persons providing full-time or part-time child care for pay on a regularly planned basis or any person associated with or employed by and private organization responsible for the care, custody, or control of children are required to report any behavior when, in his or her professional or official capacity, a reporter has reason to suspect that a child is abused or neglected.

Paid and volunteer workers should place a report even if they lack certainty that an individual has been abused. Neither the law nor The United Methodist Church require an individual to know, with certainty, or to confirm that an individual has been abused prior to notifying appropriate officials. Moreover, investigating whether suspected abuse is, in fact, based upon actual abuse is a matter to be resolved by local and state professionals.

Virginia statutes simply require individuals to report their own suspicions. Such suspicions can be very well founded (based upon behavior that would lead any reasonable person to suspect child abuse) even though ultimately local or state professionals determine that no child abuse has occurred. Moreover, as stated above, Virginia law protects those that report suspicious behavior that is found not to be associated with or to involve child abuse. An individual who reports suspected child abuse, or participates in a judicial proceeding resulting from such a report is, under Virginia law, immune from any civil or criminal liability in connection with the report. The only requirement for such immunity is that the individual reporting or participating in the judicial proceeding cannot be proven to “have acted in bad faith or with malicious intent”. In other words, workers cannot be held liable for notifying officials regarding suspected abuse that the individual reporting the behavior honestly suspects might be abuse.

### C. Reporting Procedures

1. **Inappropriate Behavior.** Certain adult behavior, while inappropriate, does not lead a reasonable person to suspect that a child has been or is currently being abused; and, therefore, does not require notification of local or state or church officials. Nevertheless, such behavior must be addressed in a timely manner in order to protect children and youth.

Any inappropriate language or conduct between a staff member or volunteer worker and a child or youth should be discussed with the appropriate staff member who is responsible for administration and/or coordination of the activity in which the individual is participating.

Inappropriate conduct includes, but is not limited to, any action that violates: (1) Virginia law, (2) this or any other written policy of the church, or (3) any written policy of the General Conference of the United Methodist Church or the Virginia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. If either the observer or the individual to whom such behavior was reported, upon reflection, determines that the behavior was not only inappropriate, but also give rise to a suspicion of child or youth abuse, the procedures for reporting such behavior to church and state officials shall be followed.

Any reported behavior that is of a very serious nature, although not giving rise to a suspicion of child abuse, shall be brought to the attention of the church staff member in charge of the event who shall participate in all meetings with the individual involved in the misconduct. When appropriate, prompt warnings shall be issued and remedial actions shall be taken.

2. **Suspicion of Abuse.** If the staff member to whom suspicion of abuse is reported believes that the child or youth is a victim and in danger of continuing abuse, immediate steps must be taken to protect the health, welfare and well-being of the individual.
3. **Contacting State and Church Officials.** After contacting state and county officials, church officials should be contacted.
  - a. Immediately notify the appropriate church staff member (paid or volunteer) responsible for coordinating the activity concerned.
  - b. Immediately begin to document in writing the relevant factors and observations. If the church staff member (paid or volunteer) responsible for coordinating the activity concerned is unavailable, the church office should be contacted. All staff members and volunteer workers will be given the name of the church staff member or volunteer worker responsible for the activity in which they are involved and to whom they would make such a report.
  - c. The church staff member or volunteer worker to whom suspicion of abuse is reported shall contact the pastor immediately upon determining that a reportable incident has occurred or immediately after a report to state officials. Additional contacts will be made by the senior pastor or his/her appointee as appropriate.
  - d. If the incident or behavior to be reported involves any of the persons to whom the report would ordinarily be made in accordance with this section, the individual observing the suspicious behavior shall report the incident to the District Superintendent (703-820-7200) and to the Staff Parish lead if this involves staff and to the Church Council Chairperson for everyone else. Following notification of the appropriate persons, the church staff person responsible for the activity or the senior pastor or a designated authority shall notify the parents or guardians of the child or youth. The parent will be asked to sign an incident report (carbon paper is to be used) and will keep the original copy of that report. If the parent is the suspected abuser, Child Protective Services will make contact with the parent if appropriate.

#### 4. Notification of State and County Officials regarding Child of Youth Abuse

Reports to the Virginia Department of Social Services can be made by calling either the:

- In-State Hot Line 800-552-7096
- Out-of-State Hot Line 800-786-8536
- Hearing Impaired 800-828-1120

State and local officials will require the following information:

- Name and address of the child or youth.
- Age of the child or youth.
- Name and address of the parent or caregiver.
- Name of the one who suspects the child or youth is being abused or neglected.
- Any other helpful information.

The reporter may choose to remain anonymous. If the reporter gives his or her name, it will remain confidential unless otherwise ordered by a court. Following notification, the matter will be transferred to the appropriate local Child Protective Services (CPS) unit.

### VIII. OTHER REQUIRED PROCEDURES

- A. **Documentation.** All conversations and actions shall be documented in writing. The initial incident will be reported using an Incident Report. One copy of the Incident Report will be turned in to the staff supervisor and one copy will go to the parents.
- B. **Discussions and Publicity.** Discussion concerning the reported incident or behavior will not be held except:
1. Between the individual reporting the behavior and the minor individual to whom the behavior was reported except as otherwise noted in this policy.
  2. Appropriate supervisory authorities.  
The parents or guardians of the involved individual unless the parents or others in the home are suspected of abusing the individual.
  3. State or local officials.

In addition, these guidelines will be observed:

1. No media shall be contacted and no statements shall be generated by anyone other than the District Superintendent.
  2. Every effort will be made to protect the identity of the child or youth who is suspected to have been abused.
  3. Every effort will be made to protect the identity of those accused of the suspicious behavior or incident.
  4. Every effort will be made to protect the identity of those reporting the suspicious behavior or incident.
- C. **Confrontation of accused.** No one shall confront the accused with the allegations unless and until advised by state or local authorities and/or the senior pastor. The accused shall be temporarily relieved of duties pending the completion of an investigation by the Church and/or state and local officials. While the investigation is ongoing the accused, if salaried by the church, shall remain on the payroll, but duty assignments should prohibit contact with children and youth. Reassignment of responsibility falls within the purview of the Staff Parish Relations group.

- D. **Care for Victim(s).** The church shall extend whatever care and resources are deemed necessary to comfort both the victim(s) of the abuse and their families and the accused and his or her family.
1. The senior pastor or his or her appointee should extend whatever care and resources are necessary to those impacted by the allegation, but under no circumstances should the pastor, church leader or church member investigate the allegation. In providing care to the principals (the alleged victim and the accused) and their families, the senior pastor or church leader or his or her appointee should under no circumstances be drawn into a discussion of the truth or falsity of the allegation which could contaminate the investigation. Do not assign blame or take any steps that involve establishing or refuting the allegation.
  2. It is appropriate to show care and comfort for the alleged victim. This should be the pastoral objective from the moment the allegation is received or otherwise made known.
  3. Observe confidentiality for both the alleged victim and the accused.
  4. There shall be a single spokesperson for the church in any contact with the media, the District Superintendent.
- E. **Insurance Carrier.** The allegations will be reported to the church insurance carrier following notification of legal authorities and church officials.

**IX. POLICY REVIEW**

The Child and Youth Protection Policy of Spirit and Life United Methodist Church shall be reviewed and, as necessary, revised annually by the Church Council. The Church Council shall be responsible for the administration and interpretations of this policy. A verification follow-up report will be made each year at the Charge Conference to ensure the integrity of the policy.





**Covenant Statement:**

The congregation of Spirit and Life United Methodist Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, and staff (paid and volunteer) who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the church. The following policy statements reflect 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.

1. No adult who has been convicted of child abuse (either sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect, emotional abuse, or ritual abuse) may work with children or youth at any church-sponsored activity.
2. All adult volunteers involved with children or youth of our church must have been active in the congregation for at least six months before beginning a volunteer assignment.
3. Adult volunteers and staff who work with children and youth shall observe the "Two Adult Rule" at all times so that no adult is left alone with children or youth on a routine basis.
4. Adult volunteers and staff who work with children and youth shall attend regular training and educational events provided by the church to keep volunteers and staff informed of church policies and state laws regarding child abuse.
5. Adult volunteers and staff who work with children and youth shall immediately report to their supervisor any behavior that seems abusive or inappropriate.

**Please answer the following questions:**

1. As a volunteer or staff member in this congregation, do you agree to observe and abide by all church policies regarding working in ministries with children and youth?    \_\_\_Yes    \_\_\_No
2. As a volunteer or staff member in this congregation, do you agree to observe the "Two Adult Rule" at all times?    \_\_\_Yes    \_\_\_No
3. As a volunteer or staff member in this congregation, do you agree to abide by the "Six Month Rule" before beginning a volunteer assignment?    \_\_\_Yes    \_\_\_No
4. As a volunteer or staff member in this congregation, do you agree to participate in training and education events provided by the church related to your volunteer assignment?    \_\_\_Yes    \_\_\_No
5. As a volunteer or staff member in this congregation, do you agree to promptly report abusive or inappropriate behavior to your supervisor?    \_\_\_Yes    \_\_\_No
6. As a volunteer or staff member in this congregation, do you agree to inform a pastor of this church if you have ever been convicted of child abuse?    \_\_\_Yes    \_\_\_No

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Contact information (phone and email) \_\_\_\_\_

I have read and understand the above Covenant Statement and the Child and Youth Protection Policy of Spirit and Life United Methodist Church. I agree to abide by those policies and procedures.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date