

Child Protection Policy and Procedures

Messiah United Methodist Church

(Revised January 2015)

The Department of Social Services reports that each year in Virginia over 45,000 children are reported to local social services department for suspected child abuse or neglect.

I. Messiah United Methodist Church

The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church state that, "...children must be protected from economic, physical, emotional, and sexual exploitation and abuse." In covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we, at Messiah, adopt this document, *Child Protection Policy and Procedures*, for the prevention of child abuse in our church.

In observance of this covenant, the Charge Conference shall annually elect a Child Protection Committee nominated by Messiah's Nominating Committee. The members of this committee shall consist of not less than six nor more than eight members and shall include:

- The Senior Pastor
- Director of Youth Ministries
- Director of Discipling Ministries
- Director of the Child Enrichment Program
- Two or three members from the congregation at-large

The duties of this committee will be to carry out the mission and purpose as stated in the policy, to annually review and propose any revisions to the document, and to be responsible for the administration, interpretation and application of the policies as stated.

II. Our Mission

Messiah United Methodist Church's mission in implementing this policy is to provide a safe, spiritual home in which each young person:

- Experiences the joy of the Lord
- Develops a strong Christian foundation
- Begins a life-long relationship with Christ and His Church

III. Our Purpose

The purpose of our *Child Protection Policy and Procedures* is to provide a caring and secure environment for children, for youth, for vulnerable adults* and for the adults who teach, guide, direct and serve them in all phases of the church's life by:

- Providing and implementing appropriate procedures specifically designed to protect our children, youth, staff and volunteers associated with the ministry of the church.
- Providing and implementing appropriate procedures of responding to alleged, reported or suspected incidents of abuse.
- Being in compassionate ministry with all affected persons - the alleged victim, the alleged victim's family, the accused, the family of the accused and the church family.

*A vulnerable adult is defined as:

- a person over the age of 60 who lacks the functional, physical, or mental ability to care for him or herself;
- a person 18 or older with a developmental disability;
- a person 18 or older with a legal guardian;
- a person 18 or older living in a long-term care facility (an adult family home, boarding home or nursing home);
- a person 18 or older living in their own or family's home receiving services from an agency or contracted individual provider.

IV. Biblical Foundation

The following scripture - Matthew 19:14 - is the Biblical foundation for our document, *Child Protection Policy and Procedures*.

“Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.’”

– Today's New International Version

In response to this Biblical mandate, our goal is to maintain a safe, secure and loving place where children and youth may grow in faith; and where caregivers, teachers and leaders minister appropriately to their needs.

V. The Law

Definition of Child Abuse:

Section 63.2-100 of the Code of Virginia defines an abused or neglected child as any child under 18 years of age whose parent, guardian, or other person responsible for the child's care:

- 1) Causes or threatens to cause a non-accidental physical or mental injury.

- 2) Causes or threatens to cause a non-accidental physical or mental injury during the manufacture or sale of certain drugs.
- 3) Neglects or refuses to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, emotional nurturing, or health care.
- 4) Abandons the child.
- 5) Fails to provide adequate supervision in relation to the child's age and level of development.
- 6) Commits or allows to be committed any illegal sexual act upon a child including incest, rape, fondling, indecent exposure, prostitution, or allows a child to be used in any sexually explicit visual material.
- 7) Knowingly leaves a child alone in the same dwelling with a person who is not related to the child by blood or marriage and who is required to register as a violent sexual offender.

In addition, the law requires physicians to report to Child Protective Services (CPS) any newborn infant who tests positive for drugs.

Reporting:

Anyone may report suspected abuse or neglect; however Section 63.2-1509 of the Code of Virginia requires that designated professionals who have contact with children immediately report their suspicions. It is not necessary to prove that abuse or neglect has occurred.

Reports can be made by calling your local social services department of the Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline at 1-800-552-7096 (or by reporting to a member of Messiah's Child Protection Committee).

Reports can be made anonymously. If you choose to provide your name, it will not be released to the family who was reported, except by court order.

Persons reporting in good faith are immune from civil and criminal liability pursuant to Section 63.2-1512 of the Code.

VI. Types of Child Abuse

Virginia recognizes and defines five types of child abuse and neglect:

- Physical Abuse
- Neglect
- Sexual Abuse
- Emotional Maltreatment (Virginia Code calls this "mental abuse")

- Substance-Exposed Newborns*

*Substance-exposed newborns are required to be reported by attending physicians at the time of birth.

Physical Abuse – is any act that, regardless of intent, results in a non-accidental physical injury to a child. Inflicted physical injury most often represents unreasonably severe corporal punishment. (Note: Corporal punishment is not illegal in Virginia (Code of Virginia Section 22.1-279.1) To distinguish between corporal punishment and abuse, Child Protective Services suggests that we remember the following:

- Discipline is a learning process; the goal is to teach appropriate behavior.
- Abuse is not a learning process; the goal is to stop behavior by inflicting pain.
- Abuse teaches avoidance of pain rather than alternative, acceptable behaviors.
- Abuse teaches resolution of conflicts with violence rather than with reason.

Physical Neglect – is defined as a caregiver’s failure to provide for the child’s health. Fifty-nine percent of Virginia reports are for physical neglect. Physical neglect can involve failure to provide a child with adequate food, clothing, shelter, and supervision. Medical neglect can involve not attending to a child’s medical needs such as leaving dental cavities untreated or failing to seek medical attention for a serious illness or injury.

Sexual Abuse - is defined as any illegal sexual act upon a child. This includes:

- Incest
- Rape
- Indecent exposure
- Fondling
- Child prostitution
- Child pornography.

Emotional Maltreatment – is called “Mental Abuse” in Virginia Code. Emotional maltreatment includes patterns of the following behaviors:

- Ridicule
- Rejection
- Intimidation
- Ignoring a child
- Indifference
- Bizarre discipline

Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect

	Physical Indicators	Behavioral Indicators
Physical Abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unexplained bruises or burns on face, torso, back, buttocks, thighs• Multiple injuries in various stages of healing• Bruises/welts resembling instrument used e.g belt, cord• Human bite marks• Injuries regularly appearing after absence, weekend, etc.• Unexplained fractures, lacerations, abrasions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reports injury by caretaker• Uncomfortable with physical contact• Complains of soreness or moves uncomfortably• Wears clothing inappropriate to weather (to cover body)• Afraid to go home• May be a chronic runaway (adolescents)• Behavior extremes (withdrawn, aggressive)• Apprehensive when other children cry
Physical Neglect	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consistent hunger, poor hygiene• Unattended physical problems or medical needs• Consistent lack of supervision• Abandonment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reports no caretaker at home• Begs, steals food• Frequently absent or tardy• Constant fatigue, listlessness, or falling asleep in class• Extended stays at school (early arrival and late departure)• Shunned by peers
Sexual Abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sexually transmitted disease (pre-teens)• Pregnancy• Difficulty walking or sitting• Pain or itching in genital area• Torn, stained, or bloody underclothing• Bruises/bleeding in external genitalia	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reports sexual abuse• Highly sexualized play• Detailed, age inappropriate understanding of sexual behavior• Role reversal, overly concerned for siblings• Exhibits delinquent behavior• May attempt suicide or other self-injury behavior• May have eating disorders• Deterioration in academic performance
Emotional Maltreatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May have frequent stomach aches, head aches or unexplained weight fluctuations• May have speech disorders• May lag in physical development• May have a non-organic, failure-to-thrive medical diagnosis• May have learning problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exhibits age inappropriate behaviors such as thumb sucking, biting, head banging or rocking• Exhibits extreme behaviors such as over compliance, passivity, aggression, or withdrawal• Exhibits emotional or intellectual developmental delays• Exhibits cruel behavior or may seem to get pleasure from hurting others and/or animals• May abuse alcohol or drugs• May have eating disorders

A combination or pattern of indicators should alert you to the possibility of maltreatment. Indicators should be considered together with the explanation provided, the child's developmental and physical capabilities, and behavior changes.

<http://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/cps/index2.cgi>

VIII. Messiah's Guidelines for Safety

In an effort to create the safest possible environment within Messiah UMC, the safety policies and procedures outlined below will be implemented. These measures include: A) screening and B) training for those who work with children, C) a six month participation rule, D) a two screened adult rule, E) standards of appropriate discipline, F) guidelines for 18 year old participants, G) open classrooms, and H) rules for dropping children off at and I) picking them up from the classrooms, and J) a restroom policy for children who find it necessary to leave the classroom or group during Sunday School or other group sessions. Each one will be explained below.

A. Screening of Those Working with Children/Youth/Vulnerable Adults and Paid Church Staff

Before working on the church staff in any capacity, and with our children, youth or vulnerable adults, each person, 18 years or older, who is an employee of the church or volunteer leader or assistant for children/youth ministries, teacher, childcare worker, or worker with our youth will be asked to complete the Child Protection Policy Training described below and sign a statement indicating that he/she has never been convicted of child abuse. No individual will be excused from this screening/training regardless of other credentials or positions held. Also, the screening forms will ask for the following: general information, criminal convictions, prior church membership, prior church volunteer data, prior experience with children or youth, and will request three personal references. Church staff serving on the Child Protection Policy Committee and/or members of the CPPP Committee will contact at least two of the personal references given. Anyone who has had a child abuse conviction, or any person who may pose a threat to children, youth or vulnerable adults, as well as anyone refusing to sign this statement will not be permitted to work with children or youth at Messiah. All persons seeking to work in any capacity with our children/youth and vulnerable adults shall also undergo a criminal record check every three years. The church will cover the cost of these background checks. A Child Protection Policy renewal application shall be completed annually by all employees and by previously screened volunteers.

B. Training for Those Working with Children/Youth

All staff and volunteers who work with children/youth/vulnerable adults must attend a training session given by one or two members of the Child Protection Committee. No individual will be excused from this screening/training regardless of other official credentials or positions. Training will consist of: complete familiarization with the Child Protection Policy and Procedures (CPPP); additional Virginia Department of Social Services resources; completing the screening forms listed in the paragraph above; and the receipt of the CPPP to be used for future reference. Refresher training will be administered every three years.

C. **Six Month Rule**

Messiah will not use anyone as a leader for children/youth activities unless that person has had continuous active involvement in the church for at least six months. Those persons involved in the church for less than six months may serve in an assistant capacity. Note: This rule does not apply to full or part-time professional staff members as screening for employment has already taken place.

D. **Two Adult Rule** – (Both must be 18 years old or older.)

The following will apply:

- Screened adults will be assigned in teams of two or more for all activities with children/youth/vulnerable adults.
- If the group is divided, each subgroup will have two screened leaders.
- If two screened leaders are not available for each group, either the group will be combined with another group to make possible the presence of two screened leaders or the activity will be cancelled or postponed.
- If a church sponsored group leaves the church grounds, two or more leaders must remain with the group for the duration of the event. If the group is mixed gender, the two leaders must include one male and one female.
- In keeping with the two adult rule, the following guidelines for the ratio of adults to youth are required.

Birth to 16 months - Four children – Two adults
16 months to 2 years - Five children – Two adults
2 years – to 4 years - Eight children – Two adults
4 years – to 1st grade - Twelve children – Two adults
2nd grade and higher - Twenty children – Two adults

E. **Standards of Appropriate Discipline**

All leaders and assistants with children and youth will use positive disciplinary measures. If a child/youth is behaving inappropriately, the leader or assistant will quietly tell the child/youth specifically what he/she is doing that is not acceptable and state what the expected behavior is; e.g., “We do not throw blocks. We use blocks for building.” or “We do not run in the building. We walk in the building so we don’t get hurt or hurt others.” If these and/or other disciplinary measures are unsuccessful, then the leader or assistant should diplomatically counsel the child/youth, inform the Sunday School staff, event supervisor and/or parents. Physical punishment or verbal abuse are not to be used at any time.

F. **Guidelines for 18 Year Old Participants**

Students who are eighteen years old and still in high school (to include the summer after completing high school) may continue to be included in youth group activities as long as they adhere to the rules and guidelines of the group. These guidelines include such measures as curfews, modes of transportation, permission slips, etc. For clarification of these rules and guidelines, participants should speak with the leaders of the individual groups.

G. Open Classrooms

Classrooms, childcare rooms and youth centers may be visited at any time without prior notice by church staff, parents or other volunteer church workers. The doors of these rooms are equipped with clear-glass windows to provide visual access which must be maintained at all times.

H. Child Drop-Off

With the pre-approval of parents given to the classroom leader/teacher:

- Young children may be dropped off by a sibling who is fourth grade or older. For safety reasons, drop-offs must be done only at the assigned classroom and with the assurance that the adult leaders are present.
- Fourth graders and older may walk independently to and from their classrooms. However, parents must inform their children of the importance of going directly to the classroom and not wandering around in the hallways.

I. Child Pick-Up

With the pre-approval of parents to the classroom leader:

- Young children may be released to a sibling who is fourth grade or older.
- Fourth graders and older may be released independently from the classrooms.
- Third graders and younger must be picked up by older siblings, parents or a designated adult.

J. Restroom Policy

If leaving class during the regularly scheduled program (for bathroom, water, etc.), and permission has been obtained from the classroom leader, children:

- and youth must be accompanied by a screened adult. Before any child, youth or vulnerable adult enters the restroom, the screened adult will enter the restroom to make sure that it is safe. If assistance is required, the screened adult will assist the individual with the door propped open so that a second screened adult can visually monitor the assisting adult. It is recommended that two screened adults be present when assistance is required in the restroom. If the situation arises that one adult must leave the classroom to escort a child/youth/vulnerable adult to the restroom or to provide first aid, that adult will return to the classroom as soon as possible in order to abide by the two-adult rule.
- When restrooms are directly accessible to children from the room where children's activities are taking place and not accessible to the general public, children are allowed to utilize the restroom alone.

- K. Internet and Social Media Guidelines – See Addendum – pages 12-13**
All volunteers shall adhere to the approved guidelines found in the addendum.

IX. Visiting Groups

Leaders of visiting groups of children/youth who use the church facilities will be required to read the *Child Protection Policy and Procedures*, and sign a statement acknowledging they have read, understand and agree to follow it (with the exceptions of part VIII sections A. B. and C) during their stay in our facility. Users of our facilities will also be required to sign a Hold Harmless Agreement. Our church facilities will not be available to groups whose leaders refuse or neglect to read and sign the acknowledgment statement and the Hold Harmless Agreement. (These two documents are attached.)

X. Reporting Child Abuse

Should there be an allegation of child abuse involving a child, youth or adult connected with Messiah United Methodist Church and its ministries, the matter shall be reported immediately to the Senior Pastor, the chairperson or another member of the Child Protection Committee. Together, the committee shall ensure that appropriate actions are taken. If the alleged abuse occurred at Messiah or in the context of its ministries, **the following procedures will be followed by the Child Protection Committee:**

1. Every allegation of child abuse shall be treated seriously.
2. Prayer will be offered for the church and for all persons affected by the allegation.
3. 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.
4. Confidentiality for both the alleged victim and the accused will be maintained.
5. All procedures that occur in handling the allegation will be documented.
6. The Child Protection Committee will meet in person or by telephone to consider appropriate actions.
7. No formal investigation will be conducted by the Child Protection Committee – only information and documentation gathering. Nor will the accused be confronted.
8. If the accused has assigned duties within the life of the church, immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the accused, remove the accused from further involvement with children and/or youth by notice from the Child Protection Committee representative until the situation is resolved.

9. Professionals will be involved as needed.
10. Should allegations be brought to the Child Protection Committee, then the following steps shall be taken:
 - a. Immediately notify the Virginia Department of Social Services of the allegation (within 72 hours as stated by Section 63.2-1509 of the Code of Virginia).
 - b. Immediately notify the parents of the victim and of the accused if it is not known that they have previous knowledge.
 - c. Immediately notify the District Superintendent. According to the Virginia Annual Conference Policy on Sexual Misconduct, the District Superintendent will contact the Conference Response Team. The Response Team will send a representative to Messiah within 24 hours to conduct an investigation.
 - d. Immediately notify the church's insurance company.

XI. Policy Review

The Child Protection Policy and Procedures of Messiah United Methodist Church shall be reviewed annually by the Child Protection Committee then by the Messiah Church Council. A verification follow-up report will be made each year at Charge Conference to ensure the integrity of the policy and procedures.

Statement of Acknowledgement

We, the leaders of _____ hereby acknowledge and certify that we
(Group Name)

have read, understand and agree that all employees, agents, and/or participants associated with this group will abide by Messiah United Methodist Church's Child Protection Policy and Procedures while on the ground of and/or using the facilities of Messiah United Methodist Church.

Signatures of Leaders:

Printed Names:

Date:

Indemnification/Hold Harmless Agreement

_____ agrees to indemnify and hold Messiah United Methodist Church
(Group Name)

(MUMC), its employees, and agents, harmless for (a) any damages, liabilities, losses, penalties, fines, charges or other expenses incurred by or imposed on MUMC, its employees, or agents as a result of any act, omission or violation of law by you or any member of your group; and (b) any liability, cost or expense (including all legal expenses) incurred by or imposed upon MUMC, its employees or agents associated with the defense or settlement of any claim, directly or indirectly related to any act by you or any member of your group.

Signatures of Leaders:

Printed Names:

Date:

Addendum – Internet and Social Media Guidelines

Messiah United Methodist Church will protect the privacy and identity of all persons under 18 years of age and all vulnerable adults in online writings, postings and discussions.

- Adult employees and staff shall not post photos or video that identify children, youth or vulnerable adults on any online site or printed publication.
- All Facebook groups and pages associated with Preschools, Children’s or Youth Ministry areas will be designated as “closed” groups, requiring all those who wish to gain access to be approved by the web site administrators.
- All church-related Facebook groups and pages must have at least two administrators. If an administrator is no longer associated with the ministry, that individual's administrative status must be revoked.
- Parents may complete an opt-out form if they do not want their children’s photos posted on the church web site or Facebook page. Photos used in these mediums, such as church newsletters, websites, blogs, twitpics, etc., must not include any identifying information of minors.
- Photos may only be posted to the Facebook page by page administrators. Adults (staff, volunteers, parents, etc.) should not identify minors in photographs posted online or in print.
- When checking in on Foursquare, Facebook, or any location tagging social media, only “check in” yourself. Never check in minors. Be sensitive to tagging or revealing other participants’ location without their expressed permission. Rather, create a hashtag to facilitate conversation.

We will maintain appropriate relational boundaries with minors.

Adults shall be careful when initiating Facebook contact with or “friending” a minor or vulnerable adult. Adults accepting the “friend” requests of minors should always be sure that the contact is and appears to be appropriate. The safest approach is for any conversations with minors or vulnerable adults to occur in open channels. When emailing, texting, tweeting, or Facebook messaging a minor, adults are encouraged to copy another adult (ideally a parent or guardian) on the message, or post it in a public venue (i.e. a Facebook wall as opposed to a private message). This will allow adults to maintain the “two adults present” Safe Sanctuaries standard when using social media.

Social media, even though it offers convenient and private channels, is not an appropriate medium for counseling - especially with minors. Begin or transition a pastoral conversation into an approved Safe Sanctuary model (i.e. office with windows, two adult rule abiding settings, etc.).

We shall not engage in the creation, viewing or distribution of pornography.

Engaging in the above stated behavior is a violation of civil laws and can lead to incarceration.

We shall not engage in, encourage or condone cyberbullying.

Every children's ministry and youth ministry group, and adult volunteer training sessions should include in its teaching information on the types and consequences of cyber-bullying, including how to identify it and how to report it.

To learn more about cyberbullying, visit: <http://www.stopcyberbullying.org> or various other websites.

We shall educate young people in the effective ways of using social media and technology to live out their Christian witness in what they write, post, share, and view.

We all must understand, and teach to minors and vulnerable adults, that once something is posted on web, sent via email or sent via text, it is impossible to fully recover or erase it. There should be no expectation of privacy or reasonable expectation that the information stops with the person for whom it was intended.

A good rule of thumb: If you don't want it posted on the church sign, website, or bulletin, do not text it or post it via social media.