



SOUTHSIDE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

POLICY FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN, YOUTH AND VULNERABLE ADULTS

Adopted by the Southside United Methodist Church Administrative Council, Month ??, 2011

PREAMBLE:

When the disciples tried to keep the children away from Jesus, he was quick to respond, *"Let the children come to me."* Jesus taught that children were to be included and provided for within the community of faith. Today, the church may be the only place where some children find the unconditional love and care they so desperately need to grow and thrive. As Christians, we must take our responsibilities to our children very seriously. We fail in our responsibilities if we neglect to take adequate precautions against abuse in our churches. It is unlikely that we can completely prevent child abuse in every situation, but it is possible for us to greatly reduce the risk by following a thorough practical policy of prevention. This policy attempts to do just that for Southside United Methodist Church. It is based on our understanding of the widespread problem of abuse throughout our country.

Every 15 seconds a child is abused or neglected.¹ Often abuse occurs in settings where children, youth or vulnerable adults should have been able to feel safe – homes, schools, camps, and most sadly the church. In more than three quarters of the reported incidents of child abuse, the victim was related to or acquainted with the abuser.²

The purpose of this policy is to provide a safe, secure environment to teach and care for the children and vulnerable adults that come to us, protecting them from sexual abuse, child molestation or any type of inappropriate sexual behavior by employees or volunteers of the church. Additionally, it is to protect both our paid and volunteer staff from potential false allegations of abuse and to limit the extent of legal liability of Southside United Methodist Church.

Presented herein is a comprehensive plan that will include all the areas of the issue: Screening, Supervision, Reporting Procedures and a Response Plan.

These delineated policies are the MINIMUM necessary precautions for protecting children. Southside United Methodist Church will endeavor to monitor updates and recommendations by The United Methodist Church and may modify these procedures.

¹ Joy Thornburg Melton, *Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1998) Rev. Melton is an ordained deacon the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church who is both a Christian educator and a lawyer. Discipleship Resources. P.O. Box 840 Nashville, TN 37202-0840, www.discipleshipresources.org. Also available from Cokesbury Bookstores, www.cokesbury.com.

² Ibid.

DEFINITIONS

ADULT means a person over 18 years of age or older.

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE as defined by The National Resource Center on Child Sexual Abuse is “any sexual activity with a child or vulnerable adult, whether in the home by a caretaker, in a day-care situation, in any organized ministry, whether at the main facility (church) or away, or in any other setting, including on the street by a person unknown to the child. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent, or another child. Child sexual abuse can be violent or non-violent. It is criminal behavior that involves children or vulnerable adults in sexual behavior. Child sexual abuse can involve fondling; penetration of the oral, genital, and anal areas; intercourse; and forcible rape. Other forms of abuse can include verbal comments, any exposure to pornographic materials, inappropriate internet activity, obscene phone calls, exhibitionism, or allowing children to witness sexual activity.”

CHILD means any person under the age of 18.

VULNERABLE ADULTS for the purposes of this policy will be adults whose mental or physical condition makes them susceptible to abuse.

CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES means any activity or program in which children are under supervision of staff persons or volunteers.

STAFF PERSONS means any person employed by Southside United Methodist Church on a full-time or part-time basis, whether or not they work directly with preschoolers, children, and students. For anyone who will have regular and direct contact with children, this person must be 21 years or older and is counted in the 2-adult rule.

MINISTRY TEAM LEADERS means any person who supervises a children's activity. This person has regular and direct contact with children, must be 21 years or older and is counted in the 2-adult rule.

VOLUNTEER means any adult, who assists in conducting children's activities under the supervision of a staff person and/or Ministry Team Leader, has regular and direct contact with children and is counted in the 2-adult rule. Examples can include but are not limited to: nursery, childcare, preschool, grade school, middle school, high school, and college workers; bus drivers; teachers; chaperones; etc.

HELPER means anyone who aids in ministry and is not counted in the 2-adult rule including a youth ages 14 - 18. Helpers should NEVER be allowed to supervise children without constant adult supervision.

PERSONS REQUIRED TO REPORT CHILD ABUSE means persons, who, in the course of their employment, occupation, or practice of their profession (clergy), come into contact with children. Such persons include, but are not limited to, medical professionals, school administrators, teachers and nurses, social services workers, day-care center workers, mental health professionals, peace and law enforcement officers.

STAFF PERSON IN CHARGE OF A CHILDREN'S ACTIVITY means the church employee responsible for this activity. In the case of non-local church programs operating on church property, the duties of the "staff person in charge of the children's activity" shall be carried out by the non-local church lead staff or volunteer.

WE means Southside United Methodist Church.

SCREENING PROCEDURES

Careful screening is one way to prevent the abuse of children and vulnerable adults. It can be time consuming and expensive, but well worth the effort in peace of mind that the most reliable, committed and experienced staff and volunteers are in place for every program that involves children.

1. All Staff and Ministry Team Leaders who have regular and direct contact with children shall be provided a Job Description and required to fill out an Application that shall include but is not limited to:
 - a. Standard contact information
 - b. Experience and qualifications for the position
 - c. Voluntary disclosure of past criminal history and allegations of criminal history
 - d. Waiver of confidentiality (Consent Form) allowing Southside United Methodist Church to secure the background checks necessary for the position being applied for.
 - e. Listing of 3 non-related references. This list shall have complete contact information for all references. This portion of the application process is considered incomplete if full contact information for the references is not provided.
 - f. A completed Child Abuse/Neglect Central Registry Clearance form (DHR-FCS-1598), dated less than one year prior to the application.
 - g. A completed Background Check through ESS,³ dated less than one year prior to the application.
2. All Regular, Occasional, and Last Minute Volunteers who could have direct contact with children shall be required to fill out an Application that shall include but is not limited to:

³ ESS can be contacted in the following ways: www.es2.com, 1-866-859-0143 (toll free) or 205-879-0143 (local). Identify yourself as being affiliated with the North Alabama Conference.

A background check must be performed for all in our church who work with, teach, counsel or chaperone children or vulnerable adults at any church, district or conference function. All adults without background checks may serve in a non-contact function under supervision of those approved. The name of each person in our church with a clear background check will be placed on church letterhead, signed by the Safe Sanctuary Team, and sent to the Mountain Lakes District Office to be kept on confidential file.

Criminal records checks will be limited to any criminal activity involving the following: (1) a minor (child), (2) child molestation, (3) any type of sexual offense, (4) any type of pornographic or obscene material, (5) any type of physical violence, (6) suspected child abuse, and (7) any other offense that might jeopardize the safety of a minor (child).

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 - b. Voluntary disclosure of past criminal history and allegations of criminal history
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 - e. A completed Child Abuse/Neglect Central Registry Clearance form (DHR-FCS-1598), dated less than one year prior to the application.
 - f. A completed Background Check through ESS,⁴ dated less than one year prior to the application.
3. Background checks will be renewed every 3 years.
 4. For local church children's ministries, persons shall demonstrate an active relationship (member or regular attender) with Southside United Methodist Church for at least six months before being allowed to be in a supervisory role for children's activities. In the case of new staff hires, references deemed adequate by the hiring supervisor will replace the six-month waiting period.
 5. Persons who have a break in service of more than one year shall re-submit to screening procedures.
 6. All forms and reference reports shall be kept as a part of an applicant's confidential personnel file.⁵ All forms shall be kept in a locked file on the church premise. Detailed notes on a designated form shall be taken for all reference checks, which shall also be included in the personnel file. All applications and related forms must be completed.⁶
 7. The staff person in charge of the children's activity(ies) is responsible for reviewing this policy with each applicant during an interview prior to service.

SUPERVISION

Supervision procedures are designed to reduce the possibility of abuse to the children or vulnerable adults and to protect staff persons and volunteers from unwarranted accusations. Again, these are MINIMUM standards and each children's activity may adopt more stringent requirements as necessary:

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Files kept regarding volunteers will be accorded the same status as personnel files of staff persons with any applicable exceptions required by the Discipline regarding clergy volunteers.

⁶ Non-local church programs shall maintain their own personnel files. Southside United Methodist Church reserves the right to obtain an explanation of the non-local church's record-keeping process and, upon written request of the Lead Pastor, to be given copies of documents applicable to programs conducted at the church.

1. Training is a requirement for all Staff persons, ⁷ Ministry Team Leader and Volunteers working with children in church children's activities. The minimum training will be an annual orientation that includes signing the SUMC Safe Sanctuary Covenant Statement and reviewing information regarding this Policy, procedures for supervision, as well as information on how to identify and report child abuse.⁸
2. Minimum supervisory standards will include the "two-adult rule".⁹ The two-adult rule requires that no matter the size of the group, there will always be two unrelated adults present. This may include the presence of an adult "roamer" who moves in and out of rooms.
3. No child will be left unsupervised while attending a Southside United Methodist Church children's activity.
4. Each room or space where children are being cared for shall have a window in the door or wall, or the door shall be left open, such as in a restroom. All activities should occur in open view.
5. Should the children's activity be an outdoor program or occur in a setting which makes it difficult to comply with this Policy, the staff person in charge of the activity shall take appropriate measures to make sure that the setting suits the activity, and the children are properly supervised.
6. No person shall supervise an age group unless he/she is AT LEAST 18 years of age or older¹⁰ and is 5 years older than the children being supervised.
7. Adult to Child Ratios should be the following:
 - a. 1:5 for elementary age children
 - b. 1:7 for 6th - 8th grade children
 - c. 1:8 for 9th - 12th grade children
8. For any activities involving transportation, every driver should have their current license and insurance on file with the church. Additionally, each parent/guardian must sign a permission/liability/emergency information form. In the vehicle, everyone should wear seat belts, no one under 85 lbs. should sit in the front seat, and if a charter bus is rented, ask the company if background checks are done on their drivers. If not, another charter bus company will be used. Youth are not allowed to drive from the church to an off-site location. Either plan to meet at the location or arrange adult drivers for all transportation. At least 2 adults and 2 youth must be present when driving personal vehicles.

⁷ An educational component of the Safe Sanctuaries Program will be part of the Application Packet and Interview.

⁸ Melton 31-32.

⁹ Abusers thrive on secrecy, isolation and their ability to manipulate victims. When abusers know they will never have the chance to be alone with potential victims, they will quickly lose interest. The two-adult rule also protects local church staff persons and volunteers from false allegations.

¹⁰ While in some situations, younger counselors and aides may provide excellent help, people under the age of 18 cannot be expected to have developed the maturity and judgment that is needed to be fully responsible for younger children. Putting children in charge of children invites disaster.

9. For overnight activities, in addition to the general Safe Sanctuary Policy, the following policies should be enforced:
 - a. In a hotel setting, no adults shall be in a bed with a child. It is preferable for adults to sleep in separate rooms with frequent room/hall/bathroom monitoring or check-ins. If possible, choose hotels with rooms opening to inside to the hallway.
 - b. In a bunkroom setting, at least 2 same gender adults may sleep in a large room with multiple bunk beds.
 - c. For off-site trips, parents/guardians must be given contact information including start/stop times and the location of the event, program content and lodging information. Also, children's ministry staff/volunteers should be given from the parent/guardian contact information, health insurance information, and a signed permission/liability form.
10. Consent forms may be completed for a one-year period and should be renewed annually.
11. The day care/preschool ministry of Southside United Methodist Church, New Beginnings Academy, must maintain a detailed, working security policy that should be conscientiously followed by all employees and volunteers, including the guidelines of the SUMC Safe Sanctuary Policy with the exception of the following:
 - a. Due to the professional relationship of the teacher and student, it is acceptable for adult:child ratios to comply with the DHR Minimum Standards.
 - b. It is also acceptable for only one teacher to be present in certain learning or artistic performance programs, provided that a qualified "floater" is frequently present.
12. For all outside groups meeting in the Southside United Methodist Church facilities, the Board of Trustees requires said groups to review and agree to comply with all of the SUMC Safe Sanctuary Policy. Groups must provide their own background checks and train their own leadership, but provide copies of those documents to the SUMC Safe Sanctuary Coordinator.¹¹

REPORTING

Once an incident of child abuse occurs or allegation of an incident is made, it is crucial that it be dealt with speedily and in a clearly outlined manner.

Alabama State law encourages voluntary reporting of child abuse in faith-based ministry settings. In keeping with Christian beliefs that children should not be abused and neglected, Southside United Methodist Church will practice and advocate voluntary compliance with the Alabama State law suggesting reporting of suspected abuse/neglect of children and vulnerable adults.¹²

¹¹ Files kept regarding outside groups will be accorded the same status as personnel files of staff persons.

¹² Nothing in the accomplishment of this policy is intended to call upon a pastor to violate the confidentiality of confession or the clergy counseling relationship. However, being mindful of the complex nature of Child Abuse, pastors of the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church undergo mandatory training (Ministerial Integrity Training) every 4 years to prepare them for the appropriate and faithful response to such incidents.

1. The Staff person, Ministry Team Leader, Volunteer or Helper who observes alleged abuse or to whom such alleged abuse is reported is required to report the incident immediately to the staff person in charge of the children's activity, who will then report the incident to the Lead Pastor.
2. The staff person in charge of the children's activity in which the alleged abuse was observed or disclosed shall immediately attempt to obtain necessary information such as the name of the alleged victim and his or her address and family information.
3. If the allegation is against a staff person, Ministry Team Leader, Volunteer or Helper, the custodial parent will be notified immediately and a face-to-face meeting with the parent will be scheduled.
4. Within 24 hours, the staff person in charge of the children's activity and/or the Lead Pastor will report the incident to the Department of Human Resources and local law enforcement (Etowah County Sheriff), including a required written abuse report.
5. Within 24 hours, notification must also be given to the Mountain Lakes District Superintendent, the Communication Department of the North Alabama Conference, and the North Alabama Conference Bishop.
6. If the Pastor is accused of abuse, the Safe Sanctuary Committee Chair can directly report the incident to the Mountain Lakes District Superintendent.
7. Any person who is the object of the report will be required to refrain from all children's activities until the incident report is resolved.
8. In any removal of a person from any children's activities, care should be taken to handle this in a discreet manner, recognizing that an investigation is still being conducted.

RESPONSE PLAN

A quick, compassionate and unified response to an alleged incident of child abuse is expected. All allegations will be taken seriously. In all cases of reported or observed abuse in a children's activity, Southside United Methodist Church personnel are NOT to undertake an investigation of the incident. However, the entire staff of that activity – employed and volunteer – shall be at the service of all official investigating agencies.

As a community of faith, in order to show respect to both parties, Southside UMC will vow to keep the matters of the incident privy and provide the respect and privacy that the accused and accuser both rightly deserve. Our desire is to keep a Christian perspective on how the incident is portrayed to the community, allowing the law to decide the opinions of truth.

The Media Director of the North Alabama Conference or his/her designee, is the only person/s authorized to make statements to representatives of the media. All requests for statements should be directed to the Lead Pastor. Training in how to handle media requests should be a regular part of staff training. A spirit of cooperation in helping the media find the "official spokesperson" is often helpful.

In the event of an alleged incident, Southside UMC personnel will not deny, minimize, or blame any individuals involved with allegations. Instead, pastoral support will be available to all persons involved with the incident.