

Easley First United Methodist Church

Safe Sanctuary Policy

Updated October 2023

Introduction

In April of 1996, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child sexual abuse occurring in churches. This resolution came about as the UMC became increasingly aware that churches were not always safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, exploitation, and ritual abuse (ritual abuse refers to abusive acts committed as part of ceremonies or rites; ritual abusers are often related to cults (or pretend to be), occur in all types of churches, in all areas of the country.

Most annual conferences can cite specific incidences of child sexual abuse and exploitation within churches. Every church has members that are adult survivors of early sexual trauma. The implications of an abuse incident in a church are far reaching and devastating. Children, families, the local church, and church leaders suffer. Litigation that often follows an allegation of abuse may cause significant financial strain for a church.

Safe Sanctuary policies were developed so that congregations could do everything in their power to prevent such incidents from happening within their facilities and programs. These policies consist of specific procedures designed for the various events that take place on church property or on church sponsored outings, that lessen the chance of any type of abuse from taking place. In 2007, the South Carolina Annual Conference voted to require that each congregation in the conference develop a policy. Now, nearly 30 years after that 1996 resolution, policies cover online conduct and extend to vulnerable adults as well as children and youth.

The United Methodist Church uses Scripture as its basis for establishing such policies.

Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes a child...welcomes me." Matthew 18:5

Jesus said, "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones... it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depths of the sea." Matthew 18:6

Our Commitment

Our church will conduct the ministry of Jesus Christ in ways that assure the physical and emotional safety and spiritual growth of all our children, youth, and vulnerable adults as well as all of our workers with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

We will

- Follow reasonable safety measures when selecting and recruiting workers.
- Implement appropriate operational procedures.
- Train our workers with children, youth, and vulnerable adults on our procedures and policies.
- Have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse consistent with the South Carolina state law.

Definitions

- A child is someone from birth through fifth grade.
- A youth is someone from sixth grade to age 18 or a high school graduate.
- A vulnerable adult is someone who is 18 years old or older, who is or may be in need of community care services by reasons of mental health or other disability, age, or illness and is or may be unable to care for him or herself, or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation.
- A volunteer is a person working with children, youth, or vulnerable adults at any church sponsored event, such as Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, nursery, or youth events.

Screening

*Adult volunteers are a minimum of 18 years old. Volunteers working with youth should be at least five years older than the oldest participant. Youth may volunteer as assistants, but cannot be in charge of a group of children or a program.

*Volunteers will be active participants in the congregation for a minimum of six months before they will be considered.

- * Holy Conversation- someone in leadership (pastor or staff person) will have a discussion with potential volunteers to get to know them.
- * Each volunteer will have a background check administered every three years.

Background checks will be performed by church staff members, but not by the pastor. Confidentiality must be kept by those who perform the background check. For those who will be driving children, youth, or vulnerable adults, there will be a background check through the Division of Motor Vehicles. Drivers will be responsible for providing proof of valid car insurance. The general background check includes felony convictions, child abuse or sexual misconduct. DUI's for five years, a poor driving record for five years, and financial malfeasance.

Procedures for Working with Children

Two adults, preferably adults who are not related to each other, should be present at any activity involving children that is sponsored by EFUMC. This is referred to as the Two Deep Rule. This will provide safety for both children and workers, and it also allows the workers flexibility when planning activities as they will have more adult help.

An exception to the Two Deep Rule will be allowed if a roving monitor is provided. In this case, the door to the activity room will remain open if there is no glass in the top portion of the door.

When taking children to the restroom, the adult should allow the child to enter alone, and the adult should remain outside the restroom. In any instance requiring supervision in the restroom (multiple children, toilet training, etc.), the door to the restroom should remain open.

A monitored feed camera may be used in lieu of a second adult when no second adult is available. The camera will be monitored at all times.

When releasing children at the end of an activity, care must be given to release the child to the appropriate person.

- Children from 0-2 years old must be released only to the parent/caregiver.
- Children 3 years old and older will be released to the parent/caregiver, or they may leave with an older sibling if written permission is granted by the parent or guardian.

Procedures for Working with Youth

Two adults, preferably unrelated to each other, should be present at each youth activity sponsored by EFUMC. At least one adult must be a minimum of five years older than the oldest youth present. If an adult worker is alone with youth, the door to the activity area must remain open.

If an adult must be one-on-one with a youth, the meeting should be in a visible space with other adults close by. In the event that a youth meets privately with an adult leader, the pastor must be notified that the meeting has taken place.

Trips Away from the Church

- Permission forms, which are filled out annually, and copies of insurance cards are to be used for all church sponsored activities that occur off the church property. Copies of this information should be with adult leaders at all times.
- Youth may not drive to or from off-campus church events.
- Adults, as much as possible, should not drive alone with one youth.
- All activities should begin and end at the church.
- Drivers of vehicles should not use a cell phone while driving. A passenger in the car should place or answer any needed phone calls. If the driver must use a cell phone, he/she should pull out of traffic and stop the car.
- The recommended ratio of adults to children/youth is 1.7.

Overnight Trips

All statements in the Trips Away from the Church section apply here. For sleeping arrangements, adults do not sleep in the same room as youth. Female adults may share a room and male adults may share a room. Married couples do not share a room.

Vulnerable Adults

A vulnerable adult is someone 18 years of age or older who has a physical, cognitive, or developmental disability that may make them more susceptible to being abused. An example is someone who has physical limitations who may not be able to fend off someone who is trying to harm them physically. Another

example is an adult with a cognitive disability who is unable to communicate with others to report that they have been harmed. The term vulnerable adults represents multiple categories of disabilities and medical conditions, making it difficult to come up with one set of procedures for this group of people. Therefore, situations at FUMC that involve a vulnerable adult will be reviewed on an individual basis. The pastor, children and youth ministry leader, Safe Sanctuary chair may be involved with any decisions made, along with the vulnerable adult (or their guardian, if applicable).

Outside Groups

- Outside groups will follow our Safe Sanctuary policy guidelines.
- Groups must provide proof of background checks for their leaders.
- Groups must provide a written notice stating that the church's Safe Sanctuary policy has been followed.
- Group leaders must immediately report suspected abuse that occurs on church property.
- If there is a special service at FUMC, such as a wedding or funeral, and nursery care is requested for children of participants, FUMC members who are Safe Sanctuary trained and screened will serve as nursery volunteers.
- Outside groups, such as family reunions, that use the FUMC facilities for their gatherings must adhere to Safe Sanctuary guidelines if children, youth, or vulnerable adults are present. Children should not be allowed to roam the buildings unsupervised.

Internet and Social Media

Modern technology is a major part of our world, and that includes the church. Like any other tool, technology may be an essential and positive part of ministry. But, technology also poses some risks, and specific procedures must be followed in order to minimize those risks.

All technology users in our congregation (and this will include many, if not most of our youth and adults) are expected to conduct themselves in a professional manner when interacting with media, such as the church website, church related group texts, and social media sites. Individuals should refrain from bullying, insulting, using profanity, or posting anything of a sexual nature.

Specific procedures are listed below.

- The church will obtain, and update annually, a permission form for each child or youth, which includes a section granting permission to post photos or videos on church related media.
- Participant full names and contact information are not to be shared (such as on group emails). Blind copy will be used for anything dealing with children and youth. Group texts, which do not reveal contact information, may also be utilized.
- All information will be delivered to a group, or with a parent copied in the event of an individual message. If there is a one-on-one electronic conversation between an adult and a youth, that conversation should be notated and reported to the pastor and a second adult.
- If a child or youth shares an individual electronic conversation with an adult, the adult should preserve the conversation so it can be reviewed later, should the need arise.
- Disappearing sites, such as SnapChat or “stories” on Facebook and Instagram will not be used for communication.
- Live streaming that involves youth and/or children should be announced and preserved.
- Church related social media accounts will have a minimum of two unrelated adults as administrators.
- Posts involving photographs of youth and/or children will be screened to ensure that nothing inappropriate is posted and that only those who have been granted permission appear. Children/youth should not be named or tagged in posts.

Response to an Allegation of Abuse

If a volunteer is accused of abuse, the steps listed below will be taken.

- Take steps to ensure protection and attend to immediate needs of the victim.
- Contact the pastor, Christian education program director, and the SPRC chair.
- The pastor will notify the parents and take the next steps.
- Proper authorities will be notified.
- The person accused of abuse will be removed from their position while an investigation takes place.

- The district superintendent, church attorney, and insurance company will be notified.

If the pastor or another staff member is accused, the steps listed below will be taken.

- Take steps to ensure protection and attend to immediate needs of the victim.
- The SPRC chair will be notified.
- The SPRC will notify the district superintendent.
- A response team may be called to support the church.
- Parents will be notified.