

High Desert United Methodist Church Safe Sanctuaries Policy

1. PURPOSE: As a Christian community of Faith, High Desert United Methodist Church is committed to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that ensure the safety and spiritual growth of children, youth, vulnerable adults, and those who minister to them.
 - a. Best practices posted at <http://www.nmconfum.com/vitalcongregations/safe-sanctuaries/> will be monitored and incorporated as appropriate.
 - b. This policy will be reviewed annually with any changes submitted through our Annual Church Conference.
 - c. The most current policy will be posted on the wall of the main classroom and made available electronically through the church website. The posted version supersedes all previous versions.
2. DEFINITIONS: The congregation will be educated on key definitions including, but not limited to, the following:
 - a. *Abuse* means harm or threatened harm to the health and welfare of a child, youth, or vulnerable adult by any person responsible for the health and welfare of a child, youth, or a vulnerable adult that occurs through non-accidental physical or mental injury; sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or mistreatment, sexual harassment, sexual contact, sexual molestation; disseminating, exhibiting, or displaying sexually explicit material.
 - b. *Adult* refers to any person at least 18 years of age.
 - c. *Child, Children or Youth* refer to a person under 18 years of age.
 - d. *Vulnerable Adult* means an adult who has one or more mental, physical or emotional impairments that render the person incapable of self-care and/or independent living without help.
 - e. *Non-related Adults* means two individuals eighteen years of age or older who are not residing in the same household and who are not related by marriage or other familial ties.
 - f. *Leader* refers to anyone directly responsible for supervision and overseeing the specific church related function, event, or activity.
 - g. *Screened Leader* refers to a ministry leader who has successfully met the defined safe sanctuaries screening requirements outlined in section 3.
 - h. *Parent or Guardian* refers to any parent, step-parent, foster parent, grandparent, or appointed guardian with the general responsibility for the health, education, or welfare of a child or vulnerable adult.
3. SCREENING AND TRAINING: Staff and Volunteer leaders will be appropriately screened and trained to ensure safe sanctuaries.
 - a. Screening requirements apply to the primary leader of any ministry activities that directly involve children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults (e.g. Children's Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, the Bus Ministry, etc.).
 - i. A minimum of six months of church participation, successful background checks, and agreement to abide by this policy in its entirety are required before staff and volunteers will be recognized as screened leaders.
 - ii. Background checks for screened leaders will be updated every two years.
 - iii. Individuals who have been convicted of neglect, physical abuse, or sexual abuse or who refuse to abide by any portion of this policy may not lead or assist in leading ministries involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
 - b. The Pastor and Safe Sanctuaries Coordinator will oversee screening and training.
 - c. Safe Sanctuaries training will be offered annually for staff and volunteer leaders.
 - d. Records of screening and training will be maintained in a locked file in the church office.
 - e. There is a three month grace period from expiration of background check or training before a leader will no longer be considered a screened leader.

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4. SAFE SUPERVISION: The following safeguards will be in place for ministries involving children or vulnerable adults to ensure safe supervision.
 - a. A minimum of two non-related adult leaders will be present
 - i. In the event that this is not feasible, activities will be relocated to a room near the main meeting area and doors will be left open.
 - ii. A minimum of 5 yr age difference is required between the leader and the oldest child or youth in attendance.
 - iii. The primary leader must be a screened leader.
 - iv. Any one-on-one interactions between a leader and child or vulnerable adult will occur with an open door and visible to all.
 - b. All internal windows will remain uncovered in all rooms, doors open, and all areas in unobstructed view (hallways, shared areas, stairwells. etc.).
 - c. A "sign-in/sign-out" procedure will be implemented for children's ministries involving children 5th grade and below who are separated from their parents or guardians.
 - i. Children must be picked up by their parents or guardians unless the leader has been notified of other arrangements.
 - ii. Permission slips are required for offsite or overnight activities. Co-ed overnight activities require both male and female adult screened leaders without exception.
5. REPORTING: Allegations of abuse will always be taken seriously and reported appropriately. It is particularly important that all parties be sensitive to the alleged victim, his or her family, as well as the accused.
 - a. Reports of observed or suspected abuse will be reported verbally to the following legal authorities within 24hrs.
 - i. New Mexico - 855/333-7233
 - ii. Federal - 800/458-9858
 - b. Documentation of allegations will be reported to Conference Leaders*.
 - i. Provost - 505/255-8786, epds-Rowley@att.net
 - ii. Director of Safe Sanctuaries - 505/255-8786, melissa@nmconfum.com
 - iii. Albuquerque District Superintendent - 505/255-8786 abqds@nmconfum.com

**Contact information for Conference leaders can change and should be verified against what is posted at the conference website: <https://www.nmconfum.com/>*