

A Safe Sanctuary at Grace UCC, Hanover, PA

I. A policy on preventing child abuse and creating a safe and holy space for children

Part of our Christian discipleship is the acknowledgement that we are God's stewards in this world – and to that end we must do what we can to care for those whom Jesus loved best. Keeping our children safe is of paramount importance.

We begin with a five-part definition of abuse.¹

1. Physical abuse: "Abuse in which a person deliberately and intentionally causes bodily injury to a child."
2. Emotional abuse: "Abuse in which a person exposes a child to spoken and/or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty."
3. Neglect: "Abuse in which a person endangers a child's health, safety of welfare through negligence. Neglect may include withholding food, clothing, medical care, education, and even affection and affirmation of the child's self-worth." (most common form)
4. Sexual abuse: "Abuse in which sexual contact between a child and an adult (or another older and more powerful youth) occurs. The child is never truly capable of consenting to or resisting such contact and/or sexual acts."
5. Ritual abuse: "Abuse in which physical, sexual, or psychological violations of a child are inflicted regularly, intentionally, and in a stylized way by a person or persons responsible for the child's welfare."

The following shall be considered policies in dealing with children at our church.

1. All those who work with children in our church—clergy, paid lay staff, and volunteer workers will submit a form for a background clearance. The clearances will be kept in a confidential personnel form, and kept locked in the office. The church shall pay for these clearances. The pastor shall attend boundary training workshops offered by the Conference. **Background clearances must be renewed every 60 months based upon the date of each individual clearance.**
2. We will observe the two-adult rule. This requires that no fewer than two adults be present at any church sponsored program for children. No adult will transport a child to or from a church function alone in the car with that child, unless they are the child's parents.
3. All workers will receive annual training to familiarize them with our policies. They will learn the appropriate steps to report child abuse, and the details of state laws regarding child abuse. A list of attendees will be recorded, with the date of training and topics covered. This list shall be kept in the *Safe Sanctuary* file in the office. **Pennsylvania State requirements for volunteers must be checked annually at www.KeepKidsSafePA.gov.**
4. The people who work with the children should be at least five years older than the oldest child in their care. This, of course, has to do with youth counselors and leaders.
5. Anyone responsible for the care of children should be eighteen years of age or older.
6. There is an open door policy for counseling of children or youth. At no time should anyone be alone with a child behind a closed door without a window...including the nursery door.

¹ This material has been adapted from Joy T. Melton's *Safe Sanctuaries*. Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1998

7. Always give parents advance notice of any special events, and full information regarding the event. Any off the premise trip should require written permission.
8. Our liability insurance must be reviewed annually by Consistory, and Consistory should appoint a member to serve as liaison for the safe sanctuary program. The Christian Education Board will monitor the program (with the pastor), with the Consistory member reporting back to Consistory as to compliance.
9. All adult volunteers who work with children shall have been members of Grace United Church of Christ for at least six months.
10. All accidents involving an injury to a child, in any church program, requires that the adult leading the program fill out an accident report form.
11. Clergy hiring shall be strictly within the Conference background disclosure guidelines. The scope of the check should be at least over the last seven years.

II. A policy on Sexual Harassment by employees, lay leaders, volunteers: All persons associated with Grace UCC should be aware that the church is strongly opposed to sexual exploitation and sexual harassment and that such behavior is contrary to church policy. It is the intention and responsibility of the church to take whatever action may be needed to prevent and correct behavior that is contrary to this policy and, if necessary, to discipline those persons who violate this policy.

Definition: Sexual harassment is defined as repeated or coercive sexual advances toward another person contrary to his or her wishes. It includes behavior directed at another person with the intent of intimidating, humiliating, or embarrassing the other person, or subjecting the person to public discrimination.

Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when:

- a. Submission to such conduct is made a term or condition or circumstance of employment or participation in any church activity; submission to or rejection of such conduct is used as a basis for making personnel or church related decisions affecting an individual.
- b. Such conduct has the effect of interfering with an individual's performance in church activities creating a hostile work environment.

Further prohibited activities include sexually suggestive written contact, sexually inappropriate verbal contact (including jokes and slurs), physical contact such as blocking movement or inappropriate touching, or sexually inappropriate visual contact such as posters, cartoons, etc.

The pastor, every employee, appointed lay leaders, and every volunteer are all ministers of the congregation. As such, each is responsible for understanding ways in which their words or actions may affect others. Sexual exploitation or harassment of parishioners, or others, by anyone engaged in the ministry of Grace UCC is unethical and unprofessional behavior and will not be tolerated.

Consistory President

Date Safe Sanctuary plan adopted

Forms attached to this policy document:

1. Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse
2. Confidential Accident Report Form
3. Volunteer Participation Covenant Statement – signed annually after training
4. Youth Group Permission and Emergency Information Form
5. Employment application
6. Confidential Report of Inappropriate Behavior by a Child or Youth
7. Pennsylvania Requirements Grace UCC Employee Checklist

Consistory Approval: 11/13/17

Congregation Approval: 6/10/18