

SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY

Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church

Grace United Methodist Church
311 2nd Ave West
Spencer, Iowa 51301

CHURCH POLICY

FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN, YOUTH AND VULNERABLE ADULTS

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 our local church. It is based on our understanding of the widespread problem of abuse throughout our country.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to protect all the children that come to us, to protect both our paid and volunteer staff from potential false allegations of abuse and to limit the extent of legal liability of our church. Presented herein is a comprehensive plan that will include all the areas of the issue: Behavioral Policies, Screening Procedures, Supervision of Children and Youth, Driver Policy, Reporting and a Response Plan.

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

DEFINITIONS

"**Adult**" means a person 18 years of age or older.

"**Child abuse**" is defined by any of the following:

- Any act, failure to act or series of acts or failures to act by a perpetrator, which creates an imminent risk of physical and/or emotional injury, sexual abuse or sexual exploitation of a child under 18 years of age.
- Any act or failure to act by a perpetrator which causes non-accidental physical or emotional injury to a child under 18 years of age.
- Any act or failure to act by a perpetrator which causes non-accidental sexual abuse or sexual exploitation of a child under 18 years of age.
- Physical neglect by a perpetrator constituting prolonged or repeated lack of supervision or the failure to provide essentials of life, including adequate medical care, which endangers a child's life or development or impairs the child's functioning.

"**Child**" means any person under the age of 18.

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

“Children’s and youth activities” means any activity or program in which children are under supervision of staff persons or volunteers.

“Two-adult rule” requires that no matter the size of the group, there will always be two adults present. This may include the presence of an adult roamer who moves in and out of rooms.

“Ministry Team Leader” means any person who supervises children’s and/or youth 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.

“Helper” means anyone who aids in ministry, including a youth ages 11-17, and is not counted in the 2-adult rule.

“Persons required to report child abuse” means persons, who, in the course of their employment, occupation, or practice of their profession, 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.

“We” and “Church” means Grace United Methodist Church.

BEHAVIORAL POLICIES

All employees and volunteers are specifically prohibited from committing any act of child/youth mistreatment, neglect, or abuse on church owned property or at any church activity. Prohibited behaviors on church owned property or at any church activity for all employees and volunteers include, but are not limited to:

- Physical abuse: strike, spank, shake, slap
- Verbal abuse: humiliate, degrade, threaten
- Sexual abuse: inappropriate touch, verbal exchange, or allowing children to view sexually explicit material
- Mental abuse: shaming, cruelty
- Neglect: withholding food, water, basic care
- Smoking or using tobacco products
- Use of alcohol, illicit drugs, or abuse of prescription drugs

All people must be treated with dignity.

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.

- A. Applicants/volunteers shall demonstrate an active relationship within the church (regular attendance for at least **six** months) before being allowed to be in any role in children’s activities. In the case of new staff hires, references deemed adequate by the hiring supervisor will replace the six-month waiting period.

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- B. Persons who have a break in service of one or more years shall submit to screening procedures.
 - C. Our church reserves the option to repeat background checks of persons who have had five or more years of service.
 - D. All forms and reference reports shall be kept as a part of an applicant's confidential personnel file which will be maintained. All applications and related forms must be completed.
 - E. A staff person (who will be designated by the Education Committee) will be in charge of the children's activity(ies) and is responsible for reviewing this policy with each applicant during an interview prior to service.
1. All staff, ministry team leaders, and volunteers who have regular and direct contact with children shall be required to fill out a **Volunteer Application Form (Form A)** and also the **Code of Conduct Covenant for Workers in Volunteer Children/Youth Ministries (Form B)**.
 2. Applicants shall be required to sign a **Consent to Perform a History/Background Check Form (Form C)** permitting a criminal history check that may include criminal records, sex offender registry, child abuse registry and motor vehicle report (when applicable).
 3. A motor vehicle report documenting applicant's driving record will be required for those applicants that may be driving children/youth to church related functions.
 4. References are checked and documented. Note: Volunteers must be known by the supervising person or recommended by someone whose judgment is trusted by the supervising person.
 5. Both supervisor and employee/volunteer are responsible for maintaining the required documentation.

SUPERVISION OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

The following process should be followed in the supervision of children and youth for all church sponsored events:

1. **Programs for children and youth**
 - a. The "two-adult rule" will be enforced. This rule requires that no matter the size of the group, there will always be two adults present. This may include the presence of an adult roamer who moves in and out of rooms.
 - b. One of the adults should be at least 18 years old or five years older than the maximum age of the participants.
 - c. Each room or space where children are being cared for shall have a window in the door or the door shall be left open. All activities should occur in open view. Should the children's activity be an outdoor program or occur in a setting which makes it difficult to comply with this policy, the 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.
 - d. Registration materials for activities in which children are taken off of church property and not under the direct supervision of their parents/guardians shall require signed written permission forms.
 - e. Parents/guardians are responsible for supervision of children if there is no nursery attendant.

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2. Nursery

- a. Parent(s) or a responsible adult designated by parent must sign-in the infant/child(ren) and note where they can be reached in case of emergency. They also will be issued an assigned pager.
- b. Sign-in registry should include both a place to note adults who have permission to pick up the infant/children and a place to note if there are persons who **should not** pick up the infant/child(ren), i.e. non-custodial parent.
- c. During Sunday Worship Services, adult/children ratio is 1 adult to 5 children (infants thru Kindergarten).

DRIVER POLICY

All church related activities requiring transportation for children and/or youth as a part of the event must adhere to the following policy:

1. Drivers must have a valid Iowa driver's license and Motor Vehicle Report (with acceptable results), and must adhere to applicable laws.
2. Without exception, all drivers (using a non-church vehicle) must be at least 18 years of age if the group is traveling within a 20 mile radius of Spencer, or be at least 21 years of age if traveling a distance of greater than 20 miles from Spencer.
3. To the extent reasonably possible, in vehicles carrying more than four children or youth, there should be an adult in addition to the driver in the vehicle.
4. Passengers are required to wear seatbelts and use child safety seats as required by Iowa law.
5. Owner of the vehicle must have evidence of insurance and at least minimum state of ownership requirements.
6. No smoking while in the vehicle or consumption of alcohol, illicit drug use or abuse of prescription medication at any time by a driver or adult passenger while traveling to, from, or during a Church sponsored children's/ youth activity.
7. Driver of the vehicle should refrain from cell phone usage, or any other distraction (i.e. dvd players, ipods, and other electronic devices) while driving.

REPORTING

1. 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.
2. The 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 person in charge of the children's activity.
3. The 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.

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4. Upon receiving such information, the person in charge of the children's activity will call the police department to make a report if it appears that the behavior is illegal. This line of reporting shall be followed in all such incidents.
5. 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.
6. 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

1. 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, the entire staff of that activity shall be at the service of all official investigating agencies.
2. Any announcement of the allegations should go through the Staff-Parish Relations Committee (SPRC).
3. In response to all allegations of child abuse, the person in charge of the children's activity shall make the initial contact with the Police Department if it appears the behavior is illegal.
4. If the allegation is against a staff person, ministry team leader, volunteer or helper or if it occurred in the course of a children's activity, the person in charge of the children's activity and the Staff-Parish Relations Committee shall be contacted immediately.
5. Even in the event that the allegation concerns activities or persons outside any relationship to a local church related event or activity, procedures should be implemented. An example of this would be a child telling a teacher about abuse by a relative during the prior year. If this report were made to the teacher in the course of his or her duties as a teacher, then the incident report should be filed with the person in charge of the children's activity within 24 hours.
6. If the allegation is against a staff person, ministry team leader, volunteer or helper, the custodial parent will be notified immediately.
7. In either case, support will be available to all persons involved with the incident as indicated.

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Approved by Administrative Council on 5/22/2007