

Safe Sanctuaries: Policies & Procedures for Child Protection, Health & Safety

First United Methodist Church – Lake Charles, Louisiana

DEFINITION AND PURPOSE

First United Methodist Church – Lake Charles (FUMCLC) has established these policies in order to:

- Safeguard children in our care from all forms of abuse and physical harm. (For the purposes of this policy, the term *child* includes children and youth birth through age 17.)
- Protect employees and volunteer workers from potential allegations of abuse.

These policies include eight (8) key components for child protection:

- Screening** potential employees and volunteers before they are allowed to work.
- Training** employees and volunteers in safeguarding children in our care from all forms of abuse.
- Prevention** by establishing barriers to child abuse within the program.
- Identification** by education on the types of abuse and how to recognize them.
- Reporting** of alleged incidents of child neglect or abuse.
- Investigation** by assuring proper investigation of all reports of alleged incidents.
- Protection** of victims from harm during investigation.
- Response** which includes a review of the alleged incident to determine if changes are needed to policies and procedures to prevent further occurrences.

Implementation of these policies is a shared responsibility of church staff, volunteers and the congregation.

ZERO TOLERANCE

FUMCLC has a zero tolerance for any abuse or physical harm of any participant in its ministries and programs, regardless of age. Deliberate violation of these policies by an employee or volunteer may result in immediate termination and/or dismissal and preclude further interaction with minors at FUMCLC.

SCREENING

All employees (as a condition of employment) and any volunteers that will be involved in an overnight activity with minors should:

- Be involved with FUMCLC for at least six (6) months (applies to volunteers only).
- Complete and submit the screening form *Application to Work with Youth and Children*.
- Successfully pass the screening process which includes a review of the information on the application, a criminal background check, and reference check(s) when deemed necessary. Individuals declining to submit to a criminal background check will be unable to participate with minors in the activities defined above. Disqualification is determined on a case-by-case basis, but in general, convictions for an offense involving children and/or offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to our mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying event. Applications and results of reference and background checks will be maintained in confidence and on file at FUMCLC.

TRAINING

- Once successfully screened, all employees and volunteers working with children should complete *Safe Sanctuaries Training* which consists of:
 - Reading, understanding, and agreeing to abide by these policies in their entirety.
 - Completing and submitting the *Safe Sanctuaries Training – Completion Acknowledgement* form located at the end of this document.
- The Safe Sanctuaries Policies may be shared with parents and the congregation at-large by:
 - Distributing copies of the policies to parents of children and youth at parent’s meetings.
 - Posting the policies on the church website.

PREVENTION & GENERAL SAFETY

- **Two-Deep Supervision** - A minimum of two unrelated adults (age 18+) should be present whenever a child is in a church facility or on a church sponsored activity, including traveling in vehicles. One of these adults should be at least 21 years of age and have been screened and the other adult may be a parent of a participant. Both male and female adult leadership should be present for co-ed activities. Teenage workers should be at least age 14, screened as specified above, complete Safe Sanctuaries training and under adult supervision.
- **No one-on-one activities between adults and children are permitted.** If there is a need for privacy, such as in a counseling situation, it should be in plain view of other supervising adults.
- **Adult to Child Ratios** – While the **Two-Deep Supervision** policy always applies, additional adult supervision may be necessary as follows:
 - 1 adult to every 4 children through age 4
 - 1 adult to every 8 children ages 5 through 12
 - 1 adult to every 10 children ages 13 through 17
- **Random monitoring** of children’s activities should be conducted by a responsible, screened supervisor and suspicious behaviors discussed immediately.
- **Maintain high visibility** of settings where adults give leadership to children. (e.g. windows on classroom doors, leaving doors open during class, etc.)
- **Check In/Check Out Procedure** (when warranted) for all children 5th grade and younger should include the following:
 - Children should be signed in and out to all events by a parent or designee at the specified area.
 - Children should be under two-deep adult supervision while on the church campus.
 - For children older than 5th grade, all pick-ups and drop-offs, including older children arriving/departing in personal vehicles, should be monitored by supervising adults.

- **Adult to Child/Youth Age Separation** - There should be at least a 5 year age difference between the primary adult supervisor and the oldest child being supervised. Persons assisting the supervisor(s) may be closer in age, but the ratio of those “closer in age than 5 years” to those “meeting the 5 year rule” should not exceed 3 to 1.
- **Respect for Privacy** – Adult leadership should always respect the privacy of youth and children and intrude only to the extent that health and safety requires. Adults should also protect their own privacy.
- **Restroom Guidelines** are as follows:
 - For the *protection of all*, workers should *never* be alone with a child in a bathroom with the door closed and should never be in a closed bathroom stall with a child. Workers should check the bathroom first to make sure that it is empty, then allow children inside. Workers should remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children back to the classroom. If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, workers should open the bathroom door and call the child’s name. If a child requires assistance, the workers should prop open the bathroom door and leave the stall door open as they assist the child.
 - *Children five years of age and younger* should utilize a classroom bathroom, if one is available. If a classroom bathroom is not available, workers should escort a group of children to the hallway bathroom. They should always go as a group, never taking a child to the bathroom alone.
 - For *children over the age of five*, at least one adult male should take boys to the restroom and at least one adult female should take girls.
- **Separate Accommodations** – No child should be permitted to share accommodations with an adult other than his/her own parent or guardian. Should health and safety dictate that children and adults be in the same tent or room, there should be adequate privacy, supervision and separation of sexes. Leaders should select accommodations with separate male/female bathing and latrine facilities.
- **Discipline** - Disciplining children should always be constructive and reflect Christian values and no child or group of children should be allowed to discipline another child. No child should ever be subjected to physical punishment, corporal punishment, verbal abuse, threats, cruel, severe, unusual or unnecessary punishment or be deprived of food for disciplinary reasons. The ***Discipline Policy*** of FUMCLC is as follows:
 - **Level 1** - When a child misbehaves there should be a logical consequence, e.g. if a child is abusing a privilege, he/she will lose the privilege until the supervisor feels he/she is able to participate appropriately. If one child hurts another child, he/she should be required to do something that does not involve another child until he/she is ready to participate appropriately.
 - **Level 2** - A child should be put in “time out” until he/she is willing to be a helpful member of the group. One (1) minute per year of age is an appropriate amount of time. If a child is removed from the group for disciplinary reasons, he/she should never be out of sight of adult supervision.
 - **Level 3** - If after **Level 1** and **Level 2** the child refuses to behave, then the child’s parents should be contacted immediately and the child removed into their custody as soon as possible.

- **Medical Information/Release Forms** are required for any activity where children and youth are away from FUMCLC's main facilities.
- **Medication** – It is our policy not to administer either prescription or non-prescription medications to the children under our care. Medications should be administered prior to participating in church activities or programs. Exceptions to this policy may be granted to parents of children with potentially life-threatening conditions (such as asthma or severe allergic reactions). Parents of such children should address their situation with adult leadership in advance of participation to develop a plan of action.
- **Sick Child** – It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all of the children in our care. Parents are encouraged to be considerate of other children when deciding whether or not to place a child under our care. In general, children with the following symptoms should NOT be dropped off:
 - Fever, diarrhea, or vomiting within the last 48 hours.
 - Runny nose with a green or yellow discharge.
 - Eye or skin infections.
 - Other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease.

Children who are observed to be ill will be separated from other children and the parent or guardian will be contacted to request that the child be picked up as soon as possible.

- **Accidental Injuries**
 - For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, workers will provide First Aid as appropriate and will notify the child's parent or guardian of the injury at the time the child is picked up from our care.
 - For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple First Aid, the parent or guardian will immediately be summoned. If warranted, an ambulance will be called.
 - Once the child has received appropriate First Aid and/or medical attention, an Accident Report should be completed.
- **Personal vehicles** may be used to transport children or youth on an FUMCLC sponsored activity if the driver possesses a valid driver's license without any disqualifications, proof of insurance at the state minimum limits, and the vehicle is mechanically sound with a current state inspection sticker. NOTE: When a personal vehicle is used in a sponsored activity, the church's insurance is secondary to the driver's personal insurance. *Two-deep leadership is required in all vehicular transportation.*
- **Church van drivers** must be between the ages of 25 and 70, complete van driver training, and be pre-approved by the church's insurer.
- **Seatbelts** - Every passenger and the driver must be securely fastened in a seatbelt, whether in a church or personal vehicle. *At no time should the number of passengers exceed the number of useable seatbelts.*
- **Cell Phone Use** – Drivers are not permitted to use cell phones (either handheld or hands free) while operating a vehicle.
- **Rested Drivers** - In cases of trips longer than 3 hours, there should be two approved drivers for every vehicle. No driver should drive for more than 8 hours in a 24-hour period.

- **Convoying** – Convoying is extremely dangerous and not permitted. Multiple vehicles on the same trip should use cell phones (except by drivers) and/or designated stops to maintain contact.

IDENTIFICATION

An abused or neglected child is one who is harmed, or threatened with physical or mental harm, by the acts or lack of action of a person responsible for the child's care. There are several forms of abuse: *physical abuse*, *emotional abuse*, and *sexual abuse*. *Child neglect* is a form of abuse that occurs when a person responsible for the care of a child is able, but fails, to provide necessary food, clothing, shelter, or care. Each state has its own definitions and laws concerning child abuse and child neglect.

Neglect

A child is neglected if the persons this child depends on do not provide food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education, and supervision. When these basic needs are deliberately withheld, not because the parents or caregivers are poor, it is considered neglect. Often parents or caregivers of neglected children are so overwhelmed by their own needs that they cannot recognize the needs of their children.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is the deliberate injury of a child by a person responsible for the child's care. Physical abuse often stems from unreasonable punishment, or by punishment that is too harsh for the child. Sometimes it is the result of a caregiver's reaction to stress. Physical abuse injuries can include bruises, broken bones, burns, and abrasions. Children experience minor injuries as a normal part of childhood, usually in predictable places such as the shins, knees, and elbows. When the injuries are in soft-tissue areas on the abdomen or back, or don't seem to be typical childhood injuries, physical abuse becomes a possibility.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is harder to recognize, but is just as harmful to the child as other forms of abuse. Emotional abuse damages the child's self-esteem and, in extreme cases, can lead to developmental problems and speech disorders. A child suffers from emotional abuse when constantly ridiculed, rejected, blamed, or compared unfavorably with brothers or sisters or other children. Expecting too much from the child in academics, athletics, or other areas is a common cause of emotional abuse by parents or other adults. When a child can't meet these expectations, the child feels that he or she is never quite good enough.

Sexual Abuse

When an adult or an older child uses his or her authority over a child to involve the child in sexual activity, it is sexual abuse, and that person is a child molester. The molester might use tricks, bribes, threats, or force to persuade the child to join in sexual activity. Sexual abuse includes any activity performed for the sexual satisfaction of the molester, including acts ranging from exposing his or her sex organs (exhibitionism), observing another's sex organs or sexual activity (voyeurism), to fondling and rape. In addition:

- Children are most likely to be molested by someone they know and trust.

- Few sexually abused children tell anyone that they have been abused. Children are usually told to keep the abuse secret. This could involve threats, bribes, or physical force.
- Children might feel responsible for the abuse and fear an angry reaction from their parents if they tell.
- Parents and other adults who work with children need to distinguish between sexual behavior that is a normal part of growing up, and sexual behavior that is abusive.
- Children who molest other children need professional help. They are much more likely to respond to treatment when young than are adults who were molesters as children and received no treatment, and continue to molest children as adults.

Possible Signs of Sexual Abuse

The best sign that a child has been sexually abused is his statement that he/she was. Children often do not report their abuse, so these are some signs to watch for:

- Hints, indirect messages—Refusing to go to a friend’s or relative’s home for no apparent reason;
- Seductive or provocative behavior—Acting out adult sexual behavior or using sexual language a child his/her age is unlikely to know.
- Physical symptoms—Irritation of genital or anal areas.

REPORTING

- Anytime that you suspect child abuse or neglect you are required to inform the appropriate authorities immediately using the 24 Hr Hotline – 1-855-4LA-KIDS (1-855-452-5437).
- In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at FUMCLC or during our sponsored programs or activities then you must also inform the Senior Minister or his/her designee immediately:
 - Senior Minister – Weldon Bares Office: (337) 436-6656
Cell: (318) 348-6820
 - Business Administrator – Jim Spitzkeit - Office: (337) 436-6656
Cell: (337) 515-3867
- If a child reports to you as either a victim of abuse or an observer of abuse:
 - Maintain a two-deep adult leadership setting.
 - Don’t panic or overreact to the information the child tells you.
 - Don’t criticize the child or tell the child they misunderstood what happened.
 - Don’t solicit more information from the child than what they are naturally telling you; leave that to a professionally trained abuse investigator.
 - Do respect the child’s privacy.
 - Do reassure the child that he/she is not to blame for what happened and that you appreciate being told about the incident and will help to make sure that it won’t happen again.
 - Keep a written record of what is reported to you.

INVESTIGATION/PROTECTION/RESPONSE

In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at FUMCLC or during our sponsored programs or activities the following procedure shall be followed:

- The parent or guardian of the child will be notified.
- The worker alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave from working with children pending an investigation.
- The church's insurance company will be notified and an incident report completed.
- The church will cooperate with any investigation of the incident by state or local authorities. In the event there is no investigation of the incident by state or local authorities, a team should be formed to investigate the circumstances of the incident acting only in consultation with the insurance company and/or attorney.
- Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position with children or youth.
- There will be a designated spokesperson to the media. All others should refrain from speaking to the media.
- A pastoral visit will be arranged if desired.
- These policies should be reviewed annually and following any incident or alleged incident to determine if changes are needed to prevent further occurrences.