

WOODLAKE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH MIDLOTHIAN, VIRGINIA
GUIDELINES FOR THE PROTECTION OF
CHILDREN, YOUTH AND VULNERABLE ADULTS
September 1, 2004 *Revised November 15, 2006*

Woodlake United Methodist Church is a spiritual community, which takes seriously its responsibility to provide a safe and nurturing environment for children, youth, and vulnerable adults who participate in our ministries. The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church state that: “children must be protected from economic, physical and sexual exploitation and abuse.”

All volunteers and employees who work in church ministries are living out the vows we take when a child is presented to the congregation in baptism. We vow to nurture our children and youth in the Christian faith. Every church worker plays a role in fostering the spiritual development of individuals and families in our church community.

The following policy has been established by Woodlake United Methodist Church in order to protect our young people (ages 17 and under) and vulnerable adults from undue risk of verbal, emotional, physical, ritual, and sexual abuse and misconduct; and to protect our staff and volunteers who work with children and youth from false accusations. This policy must be followed to allow our ministries to young people to be the best that is possible. All ministry areas are to abide by these guidelines, as well as any groups who regularly meet in our church.

Under Virginia law Section 63.1-248.2, an abused child is defined as one who is less than eighteen years of age, whose parents or other persons responsible for his/her care creates or inflicts, or threatens to create or inflict, or allows to be created or inflicted upon such a child a physical or mental injury by other than accidental means, or creates a substantial risk of death or disfigurement, or impairment of bodily or mental functions. This includes the following: failure to provide care necessary for health, abandonment, commits or allows sexual exploitation, is endangered or neglected. Child abuse may be physical, sexual, emotional or mental, and may be the result of actions or omissions to act. (I.e., lack of care for a child).

Section 63.1-248.3 of the Virginia Code states that “Any person licensed to practice to medicine or any of the healing arts, any hospital resident or intern, any person employed in the nursing profession, any persons employed as a social worker, any probation officer, any teacher or other person employed in a public or private school, kindergarten, or nursery school, any person providing full-time or part-time child care for pay on a regular basis, ...and any person associated with or employed by any private organization responsible for the care, custody or control of children who has reason to suspect that a child is abused or neglected shall report the matter immediately... to the local department of the county or city wherein the child resides or wherein the abuse or neglect is believed to have occurred or to the Department of Social Services’ toll-free child abuse and neglect hotline.”

This policy is made up of six parts:

I. Recruiting and Selecting Church Workers

II. Supervising and Training Church Workers

III. Reporting Procedures

IV. Responding To Allegations of Abuse

V. Practicalities for Mutual Protection of Leaders and Children

VI. Care of Documents

I. RECRUITING AND SELECTING CHURCH WORKERS

Principles:

- All workers - both paid and volunteer - require screening.
- Volunteers will complete the Volunteer Information Form.
- All parents will complete the Child Information Form.
- The staff person responsible for the ministry area will interview all church workers.
- A church staff person will contact references (if the worker is new to the ministry area) and agencies listed. Documentation will be kept.
- Members and constituents will only be allowed to work with children and youth in a leadership role after they have attended the church for a period of at least six months.
- Anyone who has been convicted of, or plead guilty to, either child sexual or physical abuse, will not work with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
- All church workers will agree to follow the policies.

Steps in Recruiting and Selecting Church Workers:

1. A basic information form will be used to register children and youth.
2. All church members, employees and constituents will be made aware of the Policy Statement for the Protection of Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults.

3. All church workers will be required to fill out the appropriate information form.
4. Appropriate church staff will review statements in the information forms.
5. References will be contacted and noted on the forms.
6. A check for arrest and conviction records will be made for all employees.
7. The church will seek to provide open lines of communication with parents and an open-door policy allowing parents access to programs at any time.
8. Church workers will attend an orientation and/or training session on abuse prevention.

QUALIFICATIONS

1. No one shall be permitted to serve as a care provider who, in the belief of the leader, sponsoring agency or the event director or designee, may represent a potential threat of committing abuse or violating any of this Policy.
2. No one shall serve as a care provider if she/he is known to have been previously convicted of, or pled guilty or no contest to, any crime arising out of any act or conduct involving sexual abuse, or any act or conduct which is of a sexual, molesting, seductive, or criminally deviant nature, whether or not such conduct involved a child. This includes, but is not limited to, crimes involving pedophilic behavior (molestation of a pre-adolescent child), incest, rape, assaults involving adults with special needs, children or youth, murder, kidnapping, pornography, and the physical abuse of an adult with special needs, child or youth. This qualifying rule shall be applicable no matter how long ago the crime occurred.
3. No one shall serve as a care provider who has had a verdict rendered against him or her in any civil action arising out of any personal act or conduct related to sexual abuse of an adult with special needs, child or youth. This qualifying rule shall apply no matter how long ago the civil verdict was rendered.
4. No one shall serve as a care provider who has acknowledged or admitted that she/he has participated as a perpetrator in any previous act of sexual abuse of an adult with special needs, child or youth. This qualifying rule shall apply no matter how long ago or whether a civil or criminal verdict was rendered.

II. SUPERVISING CHURCH WORKERS

Principles:

- There are specific procedures for on-site and off-site situations.
- Specific, parental permission is required for off-site meetings.
- Specific, documented, parental permission is required for adults to be alone with a child or youth, whether it is for counseling, pastoral care or transportation.
- Suspicious behavior will be discussed immediately.
- The church will provide personnel based on the ratios listed below.

- There will be a specific Nursery Identification Procedure.

On-site Procedures:

- In order to protect the children, youth and church workers, workers shall not be left alone with a child or youth, out of close proximity of another adult. Exceptions are made with parental or guardians consent.
- There shall be at least two volunteers in the classroom at all times. One must be an adult. Youth, age 12 and older, may be assistants. Exceptions are noted below.

Exception: There may be one teacher in a classroom with a group of children if there is an adult supervisor that checks in on the classroom regularly during the meeting time. Two youth may lead a class if one is age 15 or older. In these cases the door shall remain open.

- Nursery age children will always have at least two adults assigned to a room. Exceptions are noted below.

Exception: There may be one adult worker in the nursery with a group of children if there is an adult supervisor that checks in on the nursery regularly during the meeting time. Youth may assist in a nursery when an adult is present, and can be counted as the second worker.

- All rooms used by minors shall have a window in the door or remain open when there is only one adult present.
- Infants and babies must be cared for separate from school age children.
- Small group childcare must meet all child protection guidelines.

Off-site Procedures:

- At least two adults shall supervise all groups of children and youth on off-site events except as noted below.

Exceptions: When transporting children and youth to events in private cars there may be one adult, with at least two children, in the car. The driving policy of the church will be followed. In addition, this two-adult rule does not apply in parent-child relationships or if specific permission is given by a child's parent or guardian.

- Permission slips, including a medical release information form, shall be used for all off-site events.

Providing Adequate Personnel:

On-site and Off-site programs that involve children and youth will include supervisory personnel according to the following adult/child ratios:

Children (ages 0-2) 1:4

Children (ages 3-5) 1:5

Children (ages 6-10) 1:20

Youth (ages 11-17) 1:20

Church Nursery Identification Procedure:

In order to release children to properly identified and preauthorized caregiver and to make sure that the parent or guardian can be located in case of an emergency the church will:

- Require all parents or guardians to sign-in their child for every event. The sign-in sheet will ask for the child's name, parent or guardian's name, where they will be during this event (sanctuary, classroom, offsite etc.), expected time of return and identification of person(s) authorized to pickup the child.
- All children shall wear a nametag for identification.
- Pickup persons may be positively identified by picture identification.

III. REPORTING PROCEDURES

Principles:

- The church recognizes a legal obligation and will comply with all state and federal laws.
- The church recognizes its obligation for mutual accountability. (See definition below)
- The church recognizes each person's moral obligation for personal responsibility.
- The established line of reporting shall be followed in all incidents of suspicious activity, observed abuse and allegations by a victim. A church incident report will be used for documentation.
- The United Methodist Discipline and any Annual Conference policies that pertain to reporting procedures shall be followed.

- The advice of legal counsel and the insurance company are to be obtained, as necessary.

Reporting obligations:

- Church workers should be aware of state laws that govern the reporting of child abuse.
- The obligation for mutual accountability includes being aware of what types of behavior are inappropriate with children, youth and vulnerable adults, warning coworkers when questionable behavior is displayed and reporting questionable behavior to the proper individuals.
- Church workers will understand that discrete and confidential reporting of suspected abuse is critical to abuse prevention. This reporting reflects caring and is not an act of disloyalty. It is a moral and legal obligation and a personal responsibility. It takes precedence over any fear of personal or legal recrimination.

Reporting:

1. Any suspicious activity, observed abuse or victim allegations that are brought to the attention of a church worker must be reported immediately (within 24 hours) to a church staff person.
2. The person(s) making the written report of abuse or receiving the report of suspicious activity, should then document what, when, where and how, and the date, time and circumstances under which the report was made. The church incident report will be used for documentation.
3. The person(s) receiving the initial report will determine the validity of the complaint and when to inform a pastor, church legal counsel, the church insurer or the state authorities to obtain advice. In cases of clergy sexual misconduct or diaconal sexual misconduct the policies of the Virginia Annual Conference shall be followed.

Notes (the following items are important):

- Take all allegations seriously. Be gentle and protective of both victim and alleged abuser.
- Document as stated above. Anonymous allegations should be reported to counsel.
- Persons who are the object of the report will refrain from all children and youth activities until it is determined if further action shall be taken. In any removal of

an alleged party from any activities, care should be taken to handle this in a discrete manner, recognizing that an investigation is still being conducted.

IV. RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE

What is abuse?

- Physical abuse - includes hitting, shaking, squeezing, burning, biting, administering poisonous substances, suffocating/drowning, excessive force.
- Neglect - a failure to meet basic essential needs of a child, or if a child is left unsupervised at a young age.
- Emotional abuse - children harmed by constant lack of love and affection, or threats, verbal attacks, taunting or shouting.
- Sexual abuse - involvement of dependent, developmentally immature children or adolescents, in sexual activity that they do not fully comprehend, or to which they are unable to give informed consent, or which violate the social taboos of family roles.
- Ritual abuse – 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.

If a child has a physical injury or symptom of neglect:

- Contact your church leader immediately.
- Where emergency medical attention is necessary then this should, of course, be sought immediately, informing the doctor of any suspicions you may have.

If there are allegations of abuse:

- Contact your church leader immediately.

The appropriate church staff person will contact their supervisor immediately or contact Social Services or the Police direct for advice.

- Do not speak to the parent (or anyone else) if there is a possibility that they could be involved. The fact that you may feel the child's story is unlikely must not prevent appropriate action being taken.
- It is the responsibility of the church worker to pass on the possibility of abuse to the appropriate staff person. The role of the church is essentially collecting and clarifying the precise details of the allegation and providing the information.

V. PRACTICALITIES FOR MUTUAL PROTECTION OF LEADERS AND CHILDREN

- a. Avoid being on your own with any child. This may mean groups working in one large room, or adjoining rooms. Always leave room the door open when with a child alone.
- b. Never take a child home on your own - preferably have another helper with you, or else ensure that the last two children are dropped off together. If you have one child alone in a vehicle, there must be verbal or written permission given to the driver by the parent in advance.
- c. Be wise in your physical contact with children.
- d. Be wise with your relationship with the children - do not be over friendly with some at the expense of others.
- e. Male helpers need to be particularly careful in what they say, and in being around forward young females. Female helpers similarly need to be careful with forward young male children.
- f. Never smack, hit or physically discipline a child except by "holding" which may be used if there is an immediate danger of personal injury to the child or another person.
- g. If you feel that a child may have a "crush" on you, pray about it and talk to your supervisor for advice and guidance.
- h. In order to help children, we need to develop healthy relationships by listening to them and respecting them.
- i. We must be mindful of the safety of the children at all times, and in all circumstances.
- j. Have two adults present with a group, particularly when it is the only activity taking place on the church premises and do not take a group off the premises with fewer than two adults.
- k. Where confidentiality is important (e.g. counseling a young person) ensure that others know that the interview is taking place and that someone else is around in the building.
- l. Prayer works and helps in each and every circumstance.
- m. Guidance on touch. For example, physical contact between adults and children can be quite healthy and is to be encouraged in public places, discouraged in circumstances where an adult/child are on their own.
- n. Workers should treat all children/young people with dignity and respect in attitude, language used and actions.
- o. Respect the privacy of children, avoid questionable activity (e.g. rough/sexually provocative games or comments)

- p. If you invite a child to your home, ensure another adult is present and the parent is aware.
- q. When transporting a child alone, it is best that the young person sit in the back seat.
- r. Regularly review procedures to ensure common approach, sharing concerns and identifying other matters, which may need clarification and guidance.
- s. Keep brief records of issues/decisions discussed at workers meetings.

Confidentiality:

No children's worker is permitted to divulge any information concerning a child, or his/her family or anything a child may tell them to anyone other than the designated people previously mentioned. This is in order to protect the interests of the child. This confidentiality is a continuing requirement at all times and is required when workers are "off duty" or no longer involved in the ministry.

POLICY DOCUMENT - DISCIPLINE IN CHILDREN'S WORK

1. What is discipline?

Discipline is the education of a person's character.

It includes nurturing, training, instruction, chastisement, verbal rebuke, teaching and encouragement.

2. Why discipline?

It brings security, produces character, prepares for life, is evidence of love and is God's heart. Hebrews 12:6 and Proverbs 22:6.

3 Do's and don'ts of discipline in children's work:

- a. We need to be insistent, consistent and persistent.
- b. NEVER smack, or hit a child.
- c. Discipline out of love NEVER anger.
- d. Do not shout in anger or put down a child.
- e. Lay down ground rules e.g., no swearing, racism, or calling each other names, a respect for property.

- f. Keep the ground rules simple and clear, and make sure the children understand what procedure will be taken if they are not kept.
- g. Talk to a child away from the 'group', not publicly. (Explain what they have done wrong, encourage remorse and leave them on a positive note).
- h. Never reject a child, just the behavior. (Encourage the child that you want them, but you are not willing to accept the behavior).
- i. Each child is unique, special and individual, and each child needs a different method of being dealt with. We therefore need to ask ourselves:

(I) Why is the child behaving like that?

(II) Ask God for wisdom, discernment and understanding.

(III) What is the best method for disciplining and encouraging that child?

(IV) What encourages and builds children up?

(V) Work on each individual child's positives, do not compare them to each other.

(VI) Work on relationships.

(VII) Be a good role model and set a good example. (Don't expect children to do what you don't do and vice-versa).

(VIII) Take care to give quieter and well-behaved children attention and don't allow some children to take all your time and energy.

(IX) Don't say something you don't mean, and do stick to what you say, (otherwise we are implying negative teaching to the children). (Think before you speak).

(X) Pray for the children and with the children.

4. Some practical ideas for the classroom and bad-behavior discipline:

a. Change voice tone.

b. Separate children who have a tendency to be disruptive when together. (These children are often friends, don't separate them straight away, give them a chance, perhaps warn them and only separate if they are disruptive).

c. Have the child sit right in front of you.

- d. Get a helper to sit next to the child.
- e. Pay no attention to them.
- f. Be pro-active and encourage helpers to be pro-active and not wait to be told to deal with a situation.
- g. Take the child aside and talk to them, challenging them to change, whilst encouraging them on their strengths.
- h. Warn a child that you will speak to their parents and do so if necessary. (With some non-churched children we need to be wise in this, as speaking to parents may incur parent's wrath on the child and a ban from attending).
- i. If a child's behavior is constantly disruptive, seek advice and guidance from your line manager.
- j. Don't be afraid of discipline.
- k. Warn them, send them outside the room (care regarding supervision), back into the service or ban them for a week. (Never a total ban without reference to your line manager and ensure parents are advised in case of banning).
- l. Encourage good behavior.
- m. Remember each child is individual and unique. We need God's wisdom and love to encourage each one to reach their potential and to recognize their needs.
- n. Pray before you meet.

VI. CARE OF DOCUMENTS

All forms filled out by volunteers and employees working for Woodlake United Methodist Church, will be reviewed by the appropriate staff person(s). All information will be treated in a confidential manner. Except in the case of a response to a report of suspicious activity, only appropriate leaders, professional staff and the Staff Parish Relations Committee shall have access to the information on these documents. In the case of a report of suspicious activity, the church staff and appropriate legal authorities will have access to the information.

- The ministry area staff will check references for volunteers before service begins. Each reference will be asked if she/he knows of any reason why the person should not work with children and/or youth.

- Documentation must be made for each reference call.

All documents and information obtained during the screening process may be disclosed when it is reasonably necessary in the context of any criminal or civil litigation involving the care provider or the church. In addition, a care provider's records, documents, files, and information may be disclosed with the written consent, or at the written direction or request of that care provider.

- After a twenty-year period, the records will be destroyed.
- No Consent by Parent or Guardian, or any file containing such Consents shall be confidential. All such Consents and files shall be a public record, accessible to anyone in the church.
- Except as otherwise provided herein, all documents and information obtained on all care providers shall remain confidential.