

Safe Sanctuary Policy

Providence United Methodist Church

Introduction

A central tenet of the Christian faith is the inherent value and worth of all persons. Children and youth are least able to protect themselves in our society and are particularly vulnerable to abuse and neglect. Providence United Methodist Church is committed to helping to protect the youth and children who participate in the life of this congregation.

We believe implementing a policy and adopting practices to protect our children recognizes that our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to children and youth. Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child and youth sexual abuse and exploitation occur in churches, large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural and racial lines. God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and youth from abuse.

Safe Sanctuary policies and practices are essential for congregations, not only for the protection and safety of our children and youth but also for our volunteers and staff working with them and for the integrity of our witness to the world.

I. Definitions

A. "Paid Staff Person," "Potential Volunteer" and "Screened Adult"

A **Paid Staff Person** is someone paid by the church, overseen by Staff Parish and/or staff supervisors and screened. A **Potential Volunteer** is someone who has not been screened. He/she can work in a room with a Screened Adult or Paid Staff Person. A **Screened Adult** is a volunteer who has gone through the screening process. These persons may or may not be members, but they must be regular attendees and active in church activities for at least six months. Exceptions can be made for people with special skills volunteering with children (i.e., Basketball Coach), provided they are with a screened adult.

B. Pastor is a clergy person under appointment in The United Methodist Church.

C. "Youth Helpers"

A **Youth Helper** is a youth below the age of 18 years assisting with child or youth activities. He/she can assist with activities but should not be considered a screened adult and should be supervised by Screened Adults.

D. "Child/Youth Abuse"

For purposes of this Policy, **child/youth abuse** includes any of the following:

1. **Physical Abuse:** Violent non-accidental contact that could result in injury. This includes, but is not limited to, striking, biting, or shaking. Injuries include bruises, fractures, cuts and burns.
2. **Sexual Abuse:** Sexual activity or inappropriate touching with a child/youth, with perpetrators using force, making threats, or taking advantage of victims.
3. **Emotional Abuse:** A pattern of intentional conduct which crushes a child's/youth's spirit or attacks his/her self-worth through rejection, threats, terrorizing, isolating or belittling.

II. Screening and Selection of Church Staff and Screened Adults

This policy will be administered by the Business Manager.

The church shall provide training focused on current issues of child protection to those working with children and youth. Completion of this training shall be **required** of Paid Staff Persons and Screened Adults who work consistently with children and/or youth. After 5 years, the training and background check must be renewed.

- A. Training shall be computer-based and consist of the following:
 - a. Definition of Child Sexual Abuse
 - b. Victim Behavioral Characteristics
 - c. Effects of Child Sexual Abuse
 - d. Characteristics of Child Molesters
 - e. Recognizing Behaviors
 - f. Prevention
 - g. Reporting
 - h. Testing and a signature on a Covenant Statement
- B. Potential Volunteers may visit children and youth programs for a period up to 30 calendar days. While visiting, Potential Volunteers should wear a visitor nametag and should be in the company of a Screened Adult. (After 30 calendar days, Potential Volunteers will not be allowed to participate without completing the steps for the appropriate tier above.)
- C. Background check results will be viewed primarily by the Business Manager; adverse background checks shall require that additional documentation be gathered by the Business Manager and presented to the Senior Pastor and the Chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee, as appropriate.
- D. Before beginning work with either children or youth, Paid Staff Members, Potential Volunteers or Youth Helpers will sign the Participation Covenant Statement that they have read, understood, and agree to abide by this Safe Sanctuary Policy. This Covenant Statement must be signed.

- E. Where it has been determined that an applicant should **not** work with children or youth, those persons involved with the decision should handle it in a sensitive manner. The Business Manager, or designee, should inform the applicant in person if possible.

- F. All background checks, training certificates, Covenant statements will be kept by the Business Manager.

Safe Sanctuary Practices

Providence United Methodist Church

In order to ensure compliance with the Providence United Methodist Church Safe Sanctuary Policy, the following practices should be followed.

Supervision of Children and Youth

A. General Practices

1. All activities involving children and youth will be supervised by at least two adults; one of whom must be screened. (One of these may be a roaming adult.)
2. Children younger than 12 should always be in the care of a screened adult. Children and youth should be properly supervised at all times.
3. When reasonably feasible, each room set aside for children/youth should have a door with a window. (Windows in doors tend to remove the opportunities for secrecy and isolation, conditions every child abuser seeks). If a door does not have a window then the door should remain open when children are present.
4. One on one contact between adults and children/youth is not permitted. In situations that require personal conferences, the meeting should be conducted in view of other adults and youth.

B. Supervision of Classroom Activities

Two persons in the classroom is the expectation, at least one of them must be a Screened Adult. Children should be escorted to and from bathroom facilities or when otherwise leaving the room by either one of the screened adults or by a designated floating person who checks on classrooms. Where two adults are not available to supervise, the classroom doors are to remain open when a child is present.

C. Bathroom Visits

1. For the protection of our children and our volunteers, it is important to follow the following practices...
 - ...when taking *preschoolers (age 3 to 5)* to the restroom.
 - a. Single restrooms or nursery restroom are preferred for preschool children.
 - b. Adults should not enter a private restroom with a child without another adult present.
 - c. Adults may assist a child with his or her clothing in an open doorway, before he or she enters the bathroom.
 - d. Adults should encourage children to do as much for themselves as possible.
 - e. Adults may stand with their foot or a stopper in the door to monitor the needs of the child.
 - f. In an emergency situation, where a child is sick or needs your assistance, please prop open the bathroom door and ask another Screened Adult to assist you.
2. ...when taking elementary aged children to the restroom.

- a. The children may go in and the adult or youth should remain outside. If the restroom is not empty, the children should wait for the restroom to empty or the adult or youth (if same gender) may enter the large restroom and wait for the children outside the stalls.
3. Youth do not need to be escorted to the restroom.
 - a. A same sex buddy system is encouraged.
 - b. If the youth does not return in a reasonable amount of time an adult should investigate.

D. Open Door Visits

1. Parents, volunteers or staff of the church are welcome to visit and observe any programs and/or classrooms at any time.

E. Sign-in/Sign-out Procedure for Sunday School

Adults responsible for infants through 5th grade will sign their child in and out. Children will not be released to persons not authorized.

F. Supervision of Non-Classroom Activities

At least two Screened Adults should be present for all non-classroom activities involving children and/or youth. Any meetings held in an individual's home should be supervised by at least two adults who are not members of the same family. Meetings held in homes should have the approval of Senior Pastor.

G. Counseling of Children and Youth

One-on-one contact alone between adults and children/youth is not permitted, except as follows. In situations that require personal conferences, the meeting should be conducted in view of other adults and youth. It may be appropriate for the counseling to take place in a public place such as a restaurant.

III. Transportation

A. Requirements

1. The Screened Adult in charge of children/youth for each trip and shall carry parental permission slips AND permission slips for emergency medical care.
2. When a child/youth is transported in any vehicle, the driver must be either the child's/youth's parent/guardian, or a Screened Adult or a Paid Staff Person who is at least 18 years old.

3. Drivers will read and sign a *Participant Covenant Statement* indicating that he/she has read the Safe Sanctuary Policy and agrees to it.
4. Drivers may not transport a single youth/child by themselves without prior written consent from the child's/youth's legal guardian.

IV. Trip and Retreat Supervision

1. There should be at least two Screened Adults present for all trips, retreats and other events where the children and/or youth gather overnight at, or away from the church campus.
2. There will be at least one Screened Adult for each gender present at co-ed overnight events. At single gender overnight events, at least one of the two Screened Adults present shall be of the same gender as the child/youth.
3. Screened Adults for each overnight trip and/or retreat shall carry parental permission slips including permission for emergency medical care.
4. Separate rooms for adults and child/youth should be assigned with at least two _____ children/youth per room.

V. Responding to Accusations of Abuse

1. Everyone in the church has a moral responsibility to report suspected abuse, regardless of where that abuse takes place. Reporting abuse is a form of ministering.
2. When abuse of a child is observed or suspected within the church or at church-related activities, follow this process:
 - i. Immediately inform the Senior Pastor and Business Manager.
 - ii. Notify law enforcement officials as appropriate.
 - iii. Inform the District Superintendent.
3. Promptly yet with dignity and respect, remove the accused from further involvement with children and/or youth. Once the safety of the child or youth is secured, the appointed clergy and one witness or other designated persons should inform the accused that abuse has been reported.
4. Notify the parents/legal guardian of the child/youth and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety and well-being of the child or youth until the parent(s)/legal guardian arrives. **NOTE:** If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, follow the advice of the authorities concerning notification of others.
5. Take all allegations seriously and reach out to the child/youth and his/her family. Show care and support to help prevent further hurt. Extend whatever pastoral resources are needed. Remember that the care and safety of the child/youth is the **first** priority. Respond in a positive and supportive manner to the child/youth's family.
6. The church should provide a supportive atmosphere to others affected, offering both objectivity and empathy, as it seeks to create a climate in which healing can take place.
7. Keep a written report of the steps taken by the Church in response to the reported abuse. The report should be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It

should be kept in a secure place. It should be written in ink or typed to prevent it from being changed.

8. Any contact with the media should be handled by the Senior Pastor.

VI. Implementation

It shall be the responsibility of the Staff Parish Relations Committee to approve these practices.

VII. Application

All of those who participate in the life of this congregation and use its facilities – individuals, organizations, and groups within and outside this congregation – are expected to respect, implement, and adhere to these practices.

Approved by Church Council on *10/21/20* *Dennis W. Hammock Jr*

Participation Covenant Statement

I acknowledge receipt of, and compliance with, this policy. I further state that I have never participated in, been accused or convicted of, or pleaded guilty or no contest to any abuse or sexual misconduct.

Name

Date

Organization (if applicable)