

THE WEST CHESTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
CHILD AND YOUTH SAFETY POLICY

I. Objective: West Chester United Methodist Church will strive to provide a safe, healthy environment for children and youth to reach their fullest potential as followers of God through Jesus Christ. All youth will be treated with courtesy, respect, and Christian concern while attending programs and activities at our church. In all our programs for children and youth, their emotional, physical and spiritual well-being will be our first concern. We will use the tools of screening, education, supervision, and careful program design to assist the adults of our church in providing a safe environment for youth.

II. Definitions:

- A. Child or children or youth: any person who has not reached his/her eighteenth birthday.
- B. Imminent Risk: An act or recent act or failure to act or series of such which creates an imminent risk of serious physical injury to or sexual abuse or sexual exploitation to a child.
- C. Mental Abuse: An act or failure to act that results in a psychological condition, as diagnosed by a physician or licensed psychologist, including the refusal of appropriate treatment that: renders a child chronically and severely anxious, agitated, depressed, socially withdrawn, psychotic, or in reasonable fear that the child's life or safety is threatened; or seriously interferes with the child's ability to accomplish age-appropriate developmental and social tasks.
- D. Persons who work with children, youth and/or vulnerable adults: any person who works with young people under the age of eighteen (18) or vulnerable adults in any regular capacity such as Sunday School teacher, youth group leader, choir director, regular driver, regular food servers, and general helpers on a schedule that repeats such as weekly, monthly, quarterly, or who participates on-site or in transportation for an overnight or longer program.
- E. Physical Abuse: A recent act (within the past two years) or failure to act, which causes a non-accidental, serious physical injury that causes the child severe pain or significantly impairs the child's functioning, either temporarily or permanently.
- F. Serious Physical Neglect: A prolonged or repeated lack of supervision or the failure to provide the essentials of life including adequate medical care, which endangers a child's life or development or impairs the child's functioning. Other essentials include food, shelter, clothing, dental care, personal care, protection from physical injury and supervision.
- G. Sexual Abuse: An act or failure to act that results in the employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement or coercion of a child to engage in or assist any other person to engage in any sexually explicit conduct or any simulation of any explicit conduct for the purpose of producing any visual depiction, including photographing, videotaping, computer depicting or filming, of any sexually explicit conduct or the

rape, sexual assault, involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, aggravated indecent assault, molestation, incest, indecent exposure, prostitution, statutory sexual assault or other form of sexual exploitation of children.

- H. Supervision: to oversee or direct a ministry or activity.
- I. Vulnerable Adult: A person eighteen (18) years of age or older who, because of a mental or physical dysfunction, is unable to manage his/her own resources, carry out the activity of daily living, or protect himself/herself from abuse or neglect without assistance from others.

III. Categories of Caregivers

A. Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adult Leaders are adults who are twenty-one (21) years or older, and are volunteers or paid staff persons whose responsibilities involve either of the following:

- (a) Direct contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults on an ongoing basis teaching Sunday school, serving as a youth counselor or choir director.
- (b) Supervision of other volunteers.

Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adult Leaders must meet the personnel screening criteria outlined below. **All prospective leaders shall demonstrate an active relationship with West Chester United Methodist Church for at least six (6) months prior to working with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.** No person shall supervise an age group unless he/she is at least five (5) years older than the children or youth being supervised. In the case of new staff hires, references deemed adequate by the hiring supervisor will replace the six-month waiting period.

B. Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adult Assistants are volunteer's age eighteen (18) and older who may work in direct contact with children or youth on a short-term or occasional basis when properly supervised by a Children's, Youth, or Vulnerable Adult Leader. They may also work in children, youth, and vulnerable adult programs in capacities that do not involve direct contact. Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adult Assistants are required to complete the screening and training requirements outlined below. **All prospective leaders shall demonstrate an active relationship with West Chester United Methodist Church for at least six (6) months prior to working with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.** No person shall supervise an age group unless he/she is at least five (5) years older than the children or youth being supervised.

C. Chaperones are adults who are 21 years or older, who attend day or over night trips with children, youth, or vulnerable adults. They must complete the screening and training requirements outlined below. **All prospective leaders shall demonstrate an active relationship with West Chester United Methodist Church for at least six (6) months prior to working with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.** No person shall supervise an age group unless he/she is at least five (5) years older than the children or youth being supervised.

IV. Personnel Screening

Careful screening is an effective way to help protect children, youth, and vulnerable adults. It can be time consuming and expensive, but is an essential step in ensuring that the most reliable, committed, and experienced staff and volunteers are in place for every program that involves children, youth, and vulnerable adults. All Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adult Leaders, Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adult Assistants, and Chaperones must meet the following mandatory personnel screening criteria:

- A. Application.** All prospective workers with children, youth, or vulnerable adults shall complete a written application that must be submitted to the paid staff person responsible for the program for approval. All written applications shall include:
- Name
 - Address
 - Phone Number
 - Work/volunteer history
 - Experience and skills related to the position
 - Three (3) personal, non-related references. If possible, one reference should be from the congregation.
- B. Personal Interview.** For all paid staff positions involving ministry with children, youth, and vulnerable adults and for certain volunteer leadership positions, a personal interview with the Senior Pastor and paid staff person responsible for the program will be required. The Senior Pastor and paid staff person responsible for the program will determine which volunteer leadership positions require a personal interview when reviewing written safety guidelines for individual programs and activities.
- C. Background Checks:** At a minimum, the following background checks shall be obtained for all prospective workers with children, youth, or vulnerable adults. If anyone can not obtain these background checks due to administrative reasons, they may not be alone with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
- **State Police Criminal History Report:** A report of criminal history information obtained from the Pennsylvania State Police or a statement from the Pennsylvania State Police that the State Police central repository contains no information related to that person. The report or statement shall have been obtained within a one (1) year period preceding initial application. A new Criminal History Report shall be obtained every three (3) years. The original document shall be kept in the file, or a copy shall be made of the original and be kept in the file with a notation that the original was shown by the applicant.
 - **Childline Report:** A certification obtained from the Department of Public Welfare as to whether the applicant is named in the central register as the perpetrator of a founded report of child abuse, indicated report of child abuse, founded report for school employee, or indicated report for school employee. The certification shall have been obtained within a one-year period preceding initial application. A new Childline report shall be obtained every three (3) years. The original document

shall be kept in the file, or a copy shall be made of the original and kept in the file with a notation that the original was shown by the applicant.

- **FBI Report:** Where the applicant is not a resident of Pennsylvania, or where the applicant has been the resident of another state at any time during the past five (5) years, a report of federal criminal history record information shall be obtained within the preceding one (1) year period from the Federal Bureau of Investigation. A new FBI report shall be obtained every three (3) years for persons who become or remain non-residents of Pennsylvania. The original document shall be kept on file, or a copy shall be made of the original and be kept in the file with a notation that the original was shown by the applicant.

D. Denial of Employment or Volunteer Service: Based on the results of the background checks obtained from section C above, the following shall be grounds for denying employment or volunteer service. Grounds for denying employment or volunteer service is not limited to this list only:

- No applicant may be hired or used in volunteer service who is named in the central register as the perpetrator of a founded report of child abuse.
- No applicant may be hired or used in volunteer service if the applicant's criminal history record information indicates the applicant has been convicted of one or more of the following offenses under Title 18 (related to crimes and offenses) or an equivalent crime under Federal law or the law of another state:
 - Chapter 25 relating to criminal homicide
 - Section 2702 relating to aggravated assault
 - Section 2709 relating to harassment and stalking
 - Section 2901 relating to kidnapping
 - Section 2902 relating to unlawful restraint
 - Section 3121 relating to rape
 - Section 3122.1 relating to statutory sexual assault
 - Section 3123 relating to involuntary deviate sexual intercourse
 - Section 3124.1 relating to sexual assault
 - Section 3125 relating to aggravated indecent assault
 - Section 3126 relating to indecent assault
 - Section 3127 relating to indecent exposure
 - Section 4302 relating to incest
 - Section 4303 relating to concealing death of child
 - Section 4304 relating to endangering welfare of children
 - Section 4305 relating to dealing in infant children
 - A felony offense under Section 2902(b) relating to prostitution and related offenses.
 - Section 5903(c) or (d) relating to obscene and other sexual materials and performances
 - Section 6301 relating to corruption of minors
 - Section 6312 relating to sexual abuse of children
 - The attempt, solicitation or conspiracy to commit any of the offenses listed above.

- No applicant may be hired or used in volunteer service if his/her criminal history record information indicates the individual has been convicted of a felony offense under the Controlled Substance, Drug, Device and Cosmetic Act (P.L.233, No. 64), committed within the previous five (5) years.

D. Records: All written records shall be confidential and shall be kept in a locked file cabinet.

E. Education and Training. All applicants must attend a training program aimed at providing a safe environment for children, youth, and vulnerable adults before their applications may be approved. This training shall include an explanation of the Safe Sanctuaries program including:

- The need for Safe Sanctuaries policies and procedures
- Supervision requirements
- Appropriate discipline practices
- Recognizing signs of child abuse
- Reporting procedures..

The initial training shall occur prior to the adult having direct supervision of children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

An annual review shall include a review of the Safe Sanctuaries policies, procedures for supervision, and current information on how to identify and report child or vulnerable adult abuse.

V. Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adult Supervision:

A. No child, youth, or vulnerable adult will be left unsupervised while participating in a ministry activity/event.

B. All ministry activities should occur in open view. Each room or space where ministry activities/events occur must be open to public view. For example: enclosed spaces such as classrooms shall have a viewing window, a glass panel in the door, a 1/2 door configuration or an open door.

VI. Caregiver Supervision: Supervision procedures are designed to reduce the possibility of abuse or exploitation of children, youth, or vulnerable adults, and to protect staff persons and volunteers from unfounded accusations.

A. Oversight for All Caregivers. Each caregiver must be under the oversight of a clearly designated individual, and be accountable to that individual for compliance with this policy and any other written safety guidelines and procedures that apply. All caregivers will know to whom they are accountable.

B. Two Adult Rule. Regardless of the size of the group, there will always be a minimum of two adults present. This may include the presence of an adult “roamer” who moves in and out of rooms/ministry activities.

C. Supervision of Assistants and other helpers. When working in direct contact with children, youth, or vulnerable adults other than their own children, youth assistants

and other helpers should remain under proper supervision of a children's, youth, or vulnerable adult leader at all times.

D. Safety During Children and Youth Programs. Children and youth are not allowed to leave the church property or program with anyone except a parent or youth leader or without the permission of the parents/guardians in advance.

1. In the event that a child or youth is seen leaving the church, was dropped off though never attends the program, or leaves the program without informing the instructor/leader, parents will be notified immediately. Children and Youth leaders, Sunday school teachers and parent volunteers are encouraged to share such information with the Children's or Youth minister in order to communicate that information to parents/guardians.
2. For the safety of children and youth, unsupervised use of skateboards, bicycles and roller-blades during activities is not permitted.

E. One-on-One Counseling. We recognize that every children's, youth, or vulnerable adult leader may encounter a one-to one counseling situation; certain guidelines should be followed for the safety of the children and youth and protection of the counselors.

1. Leaders should not be alone with a member of the opposite sex; encourage youth to have a peer with them, meet in a public place, or have another adult present.
2. If the room in which you're meeting does not have a window in the door, the door must remain open.
3. The children's, youth, or vulnerable adult leader or assistant must report sessions to the appropriate children's, youth, or vulnerable adult coordinator and/or children's, youth, or vulnerable adult minister. They are encouraged to share any information that they feel the children's, youth, or vulnerable adult coordinators and children's, youth, or vulnerable adult minister should be made aware of.
4. All instances of possible suicide, theft, sexual assault/abuse, physical abuse, substance abuse, running away from home, violent behavior or thoughts must be reported to one of the following persons: Children's Minister, Youth Minister, the Senior Minister.

F. Overnight Rule. Any program of West Chester United Methodist Church, which includes the supervision of children, youth, or vulnerable adults during overnight activities, will observe the following procedures:

1. Written permission from the parents/guardians of the children or youth involved will be secured in advance.
2. Children's, youth, or vulnerable adult chaperones must be on site at all times during the overnight activity. The approved children's, youth, or vulnerable adult leaders are responsible for selecting, orienting, and supervising any chaperones who participate in the activity.
3. Ratio between chaperones and students is 1:4.

4. Children and youth will not be allowed to leave the location of the overnight event with anyone except a parent or guardian without the permission of the parents or guardians in advance.
5. Sleeping arrangements are required to be gender separated.

VII. Visiting Youth

When an out of town group of children, youth, or vulnerable adults are housed in West Chester United Methodist church members' homes, the following conditions will apply:

- A. Children, youth, or vulnerable adults will be hosted only in groups of two or more.
- B. Hosts will have been associated with West Chester United Methodist Church for at least nine (9) months.

VIII. Transportation Rule.

- A. The parents/guardians of each active member of the children's or youth program must complete and sign a written consent form before any West Chester United Methodist Church staff or volunteer transports a child or youth to or from any church activity.
- B. Drivers for church activities must present a valid drivers' license and proof of insurance for the vehicle they are driving. Drivers must be 21 or older and must be at least five (5) years older than the children or youth being driven.
- C. All children and youth must have proper safety restraints.

IX. Requirement to Report Immediately. Any volunteer or staff member who

- Personally witnesses an incident of abuse or
- Is told of an allegation of an event of abuse or
- Is told by a child or vulnerable adult that they have been abused or
- suspects inappropriate conduct, relationship, or abuse to a child or vulnerable adult

must inform an Associate Minister or Senior Minister immediately. Any Associate Minister receiving such a report must immediately report it to the Senior Minister. The volunteer making the allegation must put the allegation in writing. The written allegation must be dated, but need not be signed.

X. Procedure for Handling Complaint

- A. Once an incident is reported to the Senior Minister, the Senior Minister, the Children's Minister, or the Youth Minister will complete a written incident report and include the following:
 1. Name of the alleged child, youth, or vulnerable adult involved, and their parents(s).
 2. Name of the alleged volunteer, adult, or other individual(s) involved.
 3. Specific statement of the allegations of misconduct.
 4. Date, time and location that the incident is alleged to have occurred.

5. Witnesses or other individuals with knowledge or information about the allegation.
- B. The Senior Minister will consult with the parties involved and if it is felt that there is validity to the suspicion/accusation, the pastor will notify all appropriate parental, legal, social welfare, insurance or other authorities.
- C. The Senior Minister will file the report to child welfare authorities by calling the Childline and Abuse Registry Intake Unit at 1-800-932-0313. This line is staffed twenty-four (24) hours a day. The Senior Minister will also file the completed CY-47 "Report of Suspected Child Abuse" form within forty-eight (48) hours after the telephone report.
- D. The Senior Minister will inform the District Superintendent of all reports.
- E. It will be the policy of the West Chester United Methodist Church to deal with all allegations of improper conduct involving children and youth with respect and dignity for all parties involved. Opportunities for spiritual and emotional support will be offered to all parties involved. The West Chester United Methodist Church will remain unbiased and supportive to all parties involved, recognizing that incidents of abuse allegations are devastating to both the accuser and the accused, and therefore the above policies of reporting will be carried out tactfully, discreetly and without bias on the part of the reporting agent.
- F. All reports of allegations of misconduct will be confidential, and reporting agents will maintain the confidentiality of all parties, to the extent allowed by law, with the exception of required reporting to parental, legal and social welfare authorities, and the church's insurance and legal counsel.
- G. All behavior that is found to be inappropriate may lead to barring the individual from participation in children's, youth, and vulnerable adult ministries.

XI. RESPONSES FOR ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE:

Any allegation of abuse requires a process to address responding to the victim, the alleged perpetrator, and the press. The response must be quick, compassionate and unified. All allegations will be taken seriously. In all cases of reported or observed abuse there shall be cooperation with all official investigating agencies.

A. Response to victims of abuse:

1. All allegations shall be taken seriously and there shall be a reaching out to the victim and the victim's family. Pastoral resources shall be extended, and the conference I-Care Team can be contacted to assist in providing this service. The care and safety of the victim shall be considered the first priority. Response to the victim and the victim's family shall be done in a positive and supportive manner.
2. The parents of the victim shall be notified and steps shall be taken to assure the safety and well being of the child or youth until the parent(s) arrive. **NOTE:** If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, the direction of the child welfare authorities shall be followed concerning notification of others.

B. Response to alleged perpetrators of abuse:

1. The alleged perpetrator shall immediately, yet with dignity and respect for their sacred worth, be removed from further involvement with children or vulnerable adults and advised that there has been an allegation of abuse. Details of the allegations of the abuse shall not be discussed with the alleged perpetrator at the time of removal. In any removal of a staff member or volunteer from any activity/ministry, care shall be taken to handle the removal in a discreet manner, recognizing that there will be an investigation by either state or church authorities, or both.
2. When it has been alleged that a member of the church staff or a volunteer, has committed an act of abuse, the staff member or volunteer shall be required to refrain from all ministry activities/events with children, youth and vulnerable adults until the incident has been fully resolved by the appropriate state authorities and/or in accordance with Book of Discipline.

C. Response to the media:

1. The District Superintendent, the Conference Director of Communications and pastor shall decide on a single spokesperson for contact with the public/media. All media requests for statements shall be directed to that spokesperson.

XI. Enforcement. Any volunteer or staff member who directs a program will be responsible for enforcement of this policy within the program he or she directs. Overall enforcement will be the responsibility of the Senior Pastor, under the auspices of the Church Council.

XII. Compliance

Compliance with this policy shall be a matter of record at each annual Charge Conference

Appendix 1: Optional Screening Measures

Additional screening measures that can be considered include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. **Written Position Description:** A written position description defines duties, performance expectations, general qualifications necessary, and to whom the position reports. This basic document establishes a common understanding of the role for each position.
2. **Additional background checks:** In addition to the mandatory background checks, churches can conduct additional checks that include the following:
 - a. **Commercially available background searches including:**
 - i. Multi-state criminal records
 - ii. Multi-state sex offenders records
 - iii. Driver's license records.
 - b. Internet search on applicants.
 - c. Checking the Megan's Law website (www.pameganslaw.state.pa.us/)
3. **Formal Interview:** An interview provides a time to clarify any questions the church may have about information on the application, and it offers an opportunity to discuss the responsibilities of the role.