

Main Street United Methodist Church

Child/Youth Protection Policy

Main Street UMC seeks to express God's love of children and to provide for their personal wholeness. This caring community seeks to prevent abuse in any form to our children and youth.

"Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me." -Mark 9:37

Children are very important in the eyes of God; in the Scriptures, the church is called to minister to and love its children. The Bible is the foundation upon which all policies, procedures, and ministries must stand. Jesus teaches us explicitly that children have the right and keys to the kingdom of God. He demonstrated this through blessing and touch. Our goal in response to the Biblical mandate is to maintain a safe, secure, and loving place where children may grow; a place where care givers, teachers, and leaders minister appropriately to their needs.

This congregation; along with more than 400 churches in the state of Virginia, is following a recommendation by the Virginia Conference of the Methodist Church to prevent abuse of any form to our children and youth, and to be in ministry to families where abuse may occur.

Definitions of Child Abuse

By law, an abused or neglected child is defined as a person who is under 18 years of age whose parents, any other person responsible for the care of the child, or a person in a position of trust, commits an act which is not accidental that harms or threatens to harm a child's physical, or mental health or a child's welfare (Virginia Law, Chapter 12.1, Section 63.1-248.2).

There are four basic types of child abuse. The definitions provided in this document are supplied by the Virginia Department of Social Services and from the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence:

For purposes of this policy, "child abuse" is any action (or lack of action) which endangers or harms a child's physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes the following:

- **Physical Abuse:** This occurs when a child is injured by a parent, a caregiver, or other person in a position of trust, and it is not an accident. It can include, but is not limited to: assault, shaking, slapping, burning, kicking, or strangling.
- **Neglect:** This occurs when any maltreatment or negligence harms a child's health, safety, or welfare. It can include, but is not limited to: physical, emotional, or educational neglect such as abandonment or failing to provide food, clothing, shelter, supervision, medical attention, or adequate emotional nurturance.
- **Emotional Abuse:** This includes, but is not limited to: verbal assaults or emotional cruelty which can deeply harm a child's self-esteem. The injury it causes is not always visible. It can include close confinement (i.e., being shut in a closet), ridicule or terrorizing, extreme discipline, or knowingly permitting detrimental behavior.
- **Sexual Abuse:** This is any act of sexual exploitation or any sexual act committed, or allowed to be committed upon a child by a parent, caregiver, or other person in a position of trust. This includes, but is not limited to: rape, incest, fondling, subjecting the child to explicit photographs, or using the child as a subject of sexual photographs or videos.

Implementation and Review

Implementation of this policy is the responsibility of the Children's Ministry Director, as it relates to children, and the Youth Ministry Director, as it relates to the youth. This policy will be reviewed, on a yearly basis, in January by the Children's Council with the Youth Director and Trustees present. The results of the review will be presented to the Church Council every year in February/March.

Definitions

For purposes of this policy, the terms "child" or "children" include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years.

Selection of Workers

All employees and all volunteers who desire to work with the children participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes the following:

- Six Month Rule

No volunteer will be considered for any teacher or primary caregiver position involving contact with minors until he/she has been involved with Main Street UMC for a minimum of 6 months. This time of interaction between our leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation and suitability of the applicant for working with children.

- Criminal Background Check

A national criminal background check is required for all employees (regardless of position) and for the following categories of volunteers:

- Those who will be involved in our children's and youth programs;
- Those who will be involved in overnight activities with minors;
- Those counseling minors;
- Those supervising off campus ministry with children or youth;
- Those involved in one-on-one mentorship of minors; and
- Those having occasional one-on-one contact with minors (that is, church-sponsored athletic team coaches and vehicle drivers, volunteers)

Before a background check is run, prospective workers will be asked to sign an authorization form allowing Main Street UMC to run the check. If an individual declines to sign the authorization form, he/she will be unable to work with children.

What constitutes a disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by Pastoral Staff of Main Street UMC on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. Generally, convictions for an offense involving children and/or for 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. The background check authorization form and results will be maintained in confidence on file at Main Street UMC. In addition, these Background Checks will be routinely run every 5 years and kept on file.

Training

Main Street UMC will provide training on this child protection policy to all new workers and will strive to provide opportunities for additional training classes or events on an annual basis. All workers are required to attend these training events.

Two Adult Rule

Every effort shall be put forth to ensure that a minimum of two adult workers will be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during our programs and activities. For those occasions when some classes may have only one adult teacher in attendance during the class session, a floating volunteer will either stay in the class, or find an appropriate 2nd volunteer to help. A floating volunteer will be used at least every Sunday during the Sunday School hour. Youth may be “helpers”, however there should never be 2 youth leaders with no adults present.

Unlocked Door Policy

Doors should never be locked while persons are inside the room.

Teenage Workers

The following guidelines apply to teenage workers:

- Teenage workers will be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- Teenage workers must be under the supervision of an adult and must never be left alone with children.
- Teenage workers are not, under any circumstances, allowed to volunteer in the nursery.

Child Security Policies

Restroom Policy: All volunteers should take children 3 years-3rd grade to the restroom, as needed. Children in 4th-5th grade can go with a buddy. Assist children only if they ask. Encourage parents to take their children to the restrooms before class begins.

Please note: Never be alone with a child in the stall of a restroom with the door closed.

Discipline Policy

The goal of children’s ministries is to foster a sense of both fun and learning. Often, discipline can be handled by redirecting the child to a more constructive use of time and energy. Keeping the learning environment active and fun will usually eliminate the need for a lot of discipline.

However, children must also understand that sometimes it is necessary to listen to lessons, instructions for activity, etc. It’s important not to disrupt classroom times because that takes away from the fun and learning of fellow students.

It is the policy of Main Street UMC not to administer corporal punishment, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. All children will be treated with gentleness, respect, and understanding. When “discipline” is necessary, all interaction will carefully consider a child’s integrity and fragility. There should be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other physical discipline of children.

If the classroom teachers and assistants are unable to control a child after repeated attempts, the child can be taken to talk with the Director of Children’s Ministries. The director will discuss the incident with the child. Parents will be brought into the situation if needed.

If a child uses foul language, injures other children, or does anything to affect another child in a negative way, the incident will be discussed with the child and parent. The teacher and/or Director of Children’s Ministries will decide if the child will be allowed back into class or if further action should be taken.

Off-Site/Overnight Policy for Main Street UMC Sponsored Events

A Main Street UMC sponsored event is an event that has been approved and falls under the ministries of Main Street UMC. In addition to the other applicable requirements of the Child Protection Policy, all Main Street UMC sponsored events off-site and/or overnight must satisfy the following requirements:

It will require the presence of at least 2 volunteers or staff workers, which have been screened and approved for service in ministry. At least 2 males and 2 females will be present for a co-ed event.

Written parental or guardian permission, release of liability and medical release forms must be obtained for each participant.

Parents will be given the agenda of events, address and telephone contact information of the place the children will be going and the anticipated departure and return times.

Male and female children will be separated into different rooms for sleeping arrangements.

Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

All allegations of abuse will be taken seriously. Childcare workers may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect of the children under our care. In the event that an individual involved in the care of children at Main Street UMC becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child under his/her care, this should be reported immediately to the Lead Pastor and/or the Associate Pastor to begin taking steps in reporting the allegation (see attached Youth & Child Abuse Allegations Guidelines Form).

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

- Report the allegation to the Lead Pastor and/or the Associate Pastor. Immediately begin documenting all incidents as well as all steps taken in reporting the allegation (see attached Youth & Child Abuse Allegations Guidelines Form).
- Notify the Department of Social Services of the allegation.
- Notify the UMC District Superintendent. According to the Virginia Annual Conference Policy on Sexual Misconduct, the District Superintendent will contact the Conference Response Team. The Response Team will send a representative to Main Street UMC within 24 hours to conduct an investigation.
- 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.
- Our insurance company will be notified, and we will complete an incident report.
- We will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists.
- We 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 will be formed to investigate the circumstances of the incident. The team should act only in consultation with our 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.
- The Chairperson of the Staff Parish Relations Committee and/or the Lead Pastor will be our spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect, unless he or she is alleged to be involved. All other workers should refrain from speaking to the media.
- A pastoral visit will be arranged for those who desire it.
- All suspected abuse reports will be made by the individual suspecting abuse, with guidance and support from appropriate church staff.

Additionally, the following procedures will be followed:

DO NOT CONFRONT THE ACCUSED WITH THE ALLEGATION. If the accused performs duties with the church, the Pastors will remove him/her from their duties until the investigation is concluded.

The Pastor should extend whatever care and resources necessary. The Pastoral objective should be to show care and comfort to the alleged victim.

Observe strict confidentiality for the alleged, both victim and accused.

Any child abuse allegation is a serious matter. Please pray for the church and all persons affected by the allegation.

Precautions the church will take include:

Completed application forms and records of background checks and screening procedures should be kept for five years after a volunteer completes his/her time of service.

The church will be prepared to show the precautions it takes with every volunteer who ministers in areas where abuse should occur.