

Chester United Methodist Church Child Protection Policy and Procedures

I. Purpose

1. To help Chester United Methodist Church provide a caring and secure environment for children and youth in all phases of church life.
2. To help Chester United Methodist Church guard against legal risk and liability exposure.

II. Biblical Foundation

In Mark 10:13-16, Jesus teaches us explicitly that children have the right and the keys to the Kingdom of God. He demonstrated this through blessing and touch. Our goal at Chester United Methodist Church in response to this 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.

III. Virginia's Child Abuse Law

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 impairments of bodily or mental functions. This includes the following: failure to provide care necessary for health, abandonment, committing or allowing sexual exploitation, endangering or neglecting. Child abuse may be physical, sexual, emotional, or mental, and may be the result of actions or failure to act.

Section 63.1-148.3, Virginia Revised Code, states that "...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 planned 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 Social Services 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."

Everyone should report any known or reasonably suspected child abuse immediately. Any report is confidential and the person making the report is immune from liability for making such a report, unless it is proven that such a person acted in bad faith or with malicious intent.

IV. Types of Child Abuse (the following definitions and explanations are from the Virginia Department of Social Services)

1. Physical Abuse

A physical injury, threat of injury or creation of a real and significant danger of substantial risk of death, disfigurement or impairment of bodily functions. Such injury or threat of injury, regardless of intent, is inflicted or allowed to be inflicted by non-accidental means. Examples: asphyxiation; bone fracture; brain damage, skull fracture, subdural hematoma; burns, scalding; cuts, bruises, welts, abrasion; internal injuries, poisoning; sprains, dislocations; gunshot, stabbing wounds.

2. Physical Neglect

The failure to provide food, clothing, shelter, or supervision for a child if the child's health or safety is endangered. Physical neglect may include multiple occurrences or a one-time critical or severe event that results in a threat to health or safety, such as a toddler left alone. Other types of neglect include abandonment, inadequate supervision, inadequate clothing, inadequate shelter, inadequate personal hygiene, inadequate food and malnutrition.

3. Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse includes any act defined in the code of Virginia which is committed, or allowed to be committed, upon a child by his/her parent or other persons responsible for the child's care. Examples of such abuse are: sexual exploitation, sexual molestation, intercourse/sodomy and other sexual abuse.

4. Medical Neglect

Refusal or failure by caretaker to obtain and/or follow through with a complete regimen of medical, mental or dental care for a condition, which if untreated, could result in illness or developmental delays.

5. Failure to Thrive

A syndrome of infancy or early childhood which is characterized by growth failure, signs of severe malnutrition, and variable degrees of developmental retardation. Children are considered to be in this category only when the syndrome is diagnosed by a physician and is caused by non-organic factors.

6. Mental Abuse/Neglect

A pattern of acts or omissions by the caretaker which result in harm to a child's psychological or emotional health or development.

7. Educational Neglect

The child's caretaker is directly responsible for the failure of the child to attend school or an approved alternative program of study.

8. Bizarre Discipline

Any actions in which the caretaker uses eccentric, irrational or grossly inappropriate procedures or devices to modify the child's behavior

V. Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse

In an effort to create the safest possible environment within Chester United Methodist Church, several abuse prevention measures will be utilized.

1. Six Month Rule

Chester United Methodist Church will not use anyone as a worker for children or youth in the church unless that person has been an active participant in the church for at least six months, or at the discretion of the pastor or director of Christian education.

2. Staff Screening/Training

Before beginning service, each children's teacher, child care worker, or youth worker will be asked to sign a statement indicating that he/she has never been convicted of child abuse nor had such a conviction expunged, and that they have read and understand the church's child abuse and protection policy and agree to abide by it. Anyone refusing to sign this form will not be permitted to work with children or youth.

Leaders of community groups of children or youth who use the church facilities will also be asked to read the policy and sign the acknowledgment form.

3. Two Adult (18 years or older) Rule

Whenever possible, teachers will be assigned in teams of two or more per Sunday school hour to every class of children or youth. Other church sponsored or community groups of children or youth who meet at the church are encouraged to have two or more adult leaders present. When the group includes both boys and girls, both male and female adult leaders should be present. If the group stays overnight at the church, or if a church sponsored group leaves the premises, two or more adult leaders should be present and should include at least one male and one female if the group is mixed gender.

4. Classroom Discipline

All teachers and workers will use the following discipline measures. If a child is behaving inappropriately, the teacher or worker will tell the child specifically what he/she is doing that is not acceptable and state what the expected behavior is, e.g., "We do not throw the blocks. We use blocks for building." If this measure is not effective, the child will be guided to another activity. If inappropriate behavior continues, the child may be placed at a table to work alone away from the other students. If the child's disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, the child may be taken to the director of Spiritual formation who will then contact the child's parents. No physical punishment or verbal abuse is to be used at any time. If isolating the child within the classroom or removal of the child from the room becomes necessary, the situation will be discussed

with the child's parents or guardian as soon as possible.

5. Open Classrooms

Classrooms or child care rooms may be visited without prior notice by church staff, parents, or other volunteer church workers. Brief observations of child care rooms and classrooms of children or youth may be conducted by the Director of Spiritual Formation during Sunday school hours.

6. Transportation

Permission forms will be required from parents if children or youth will be traveling off of church property. No one under 21 will be permitted to provide transportation for a distance greater than 30 miles for other youth or children during a church-sponsored activity.

7. Child Care

If child care is provided within the church facility during a church-sponsored function (i.e., dinner, Bible study, music rehearsal, etc), and those providing the child care are youth under the age of 18, parents will be required to sign a form stating that they understand that an adult will not be present with their child.

8. Overnight Activities

If an overnight function is held for children or youth (i.e. a lock-in), males and females will not be permitted to sleep in the same room.

VI. Reporting Child Abuse

Should there be allegations of child abuse at Chester United Methodist Church, these procedures will be followed:

1. Treat any allegation of child abuse seriously; do not ignore the issues in the hope it will go away.
2. Any children or youth worker suspecting child abuse should report to the director of Christian education, who will report to the pastor. In consultation, they will then determine whether or not to proceed with the allegation.
3. Report the allegation to the Virginia Department of Social Services as required by state law. If you are uncertain about what has happened or how to proceed, you may call anonymously. VDSS will help you determine next steps and/or will conduct an investigation if warranted.
4. Document all procedures observed in handling the allegation.
5. Call the District Superintendent.

6. Report the allegation to the church insurance carrier immediately upon notifying the District Superintendent.
7. Notify the victim's parents of the alleged incident.
8. Pray for the church and all persons affected by the allegation.
9. Do not confront the accused with the allegation. If the accused has assigned church duties, that person should be relieved temporarily of his/her duties until the investigation is concluded.
10. The pastor should extend whatever care and resources necessary, but under **no** circumstances should the pastor or any church leader or member investigate the allegation. In providing care to the alleged victim and accused and their families, the pastor should under **no** circumstances be drawn into a discussion of the truth or falsity of the allegation which could contaminate the investigation. Do not assign blame or take any steps that involve establishing or refuting the allegation.
11. It is appropriate to show care and comfort for the alleged victim. This should be the pastoral objective from the moment the allegation is received or otherwise made known.
12. Observe confidentiality for both the alleged victim and the accused until advised to the contrary by the Response Team or council for the church insurance carrier.

VII. Approval

Approved by the Administrative Council, Chester United Methodist Church

Date _____ August 2010 _____

It is recommended that these policies and procedures be reviewed annually.

Please answer, sign, date, and return this page to indicate you have read, understand, and accept the Child Protection Policy and Procedures of Chester United Methodist Church.

Present Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Home Phone () _____

Child Protection Promise and Statement of Covenant:

I am a Christian child caregiver/teacher/youth worker of this congregation. I pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all our children and youth. I will follow reasonable safety measures to protect our children. I will be familiar with the child protection guidelines adopted by Chester United Methodist Church. I will report any suspicion of child abuse. I will demonstrate the love of Jesus so that each child will be “surrounded by steadfast love, . . . established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal” (United Methodist Hymnal pg.44) I know the difference between good/appropriate signs of affection and those that could be interpreted as inappropriate.

I promise that while I am in a volunteer position with children and youth: When transporting children: I have a valid driver’s license. I have auto insurance.

I will not use a cell phone while driving.

I will refrain from using tobacco products in the presence of children and youth.

I understand it is prohibited to be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs when with the children and youth.

I will not consume alcohol while volunteering with children and youth.

I will not have consumed alcohol within three hours of working with the children and youth.

Signed _____ Date _____

I have read and understand the policy and agree to abide by it. I have no convictions for child abuse or expungement of such convictions.

(Your Signature) Date _____