



April 2019

Athens First United Methodist Church Safe Sanctuary: Child Abuse Prevention Policy & Procedure Statement

Introduction

The General Conference mandate of 1996 requires all United Methodist Churches to implement policies and procedures to make sure no harm comes to those under the age of 18 or adults who cannot care for themselves while they are in our care and ministry. This mandate has been reaffirmed by every GC since. In 2008, when vulnerable adults* were added.

Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we adopt this policy for the prevention of all types of abuse of children and vulnerable adults and for the protection of staff and volunteers at Athens First United Methodist Church.

*Vulnerable adults are defined as those people over the age of 18 who may be more at risk for abuse because of mental or physical disabilities or advanced age.

Purpose

Our congregation's purpose for establishing this policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all our children, youth, and vulnerable adults. It is intended to provide a guide for that protection as well as the protection of our adult workers and the church.

Scope

We pledge to conduct God's ministry in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of

- Children – Birth through age 12
- Youth – Ages 13 to 18
- Trustees and other church leadership
- Vulnerable Adults
 - May be persons age 18 or older who are mentally, physically or psychologically challenged and unable to make responsible legal decisions about his/her own welfare
 - May be elderly, defined as age 65 and older

This plan also protects the church, its finances and reputation. “**Workers**” are both those who volunteer and those who work for pay.

The following programs which occur within our building and outside the building as church sanctioned events are required to follow this policy, to include but are not limited to:

- Weekday Preschool
- Scouting
- Recreation programs
- Community Programs (for example, Community Bible Study)
- All ministry programming and events of Athens First United Methodist Church

We will:

- Follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of paid and volunteer workers.
- Implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events.
- Train all those working with or around children, youth, and vulnerable adults regarding policies and methods.
- Implement a clearly defined procedure for reporting suspected incidents of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law, responding appropriately to victim and accused and for responding to media inquiries if an incident occurs.

Prevention Guidelines

The following guidelines will be followed in an effort to reduce the risk of child abuse in our church:

I. Selection and Screening of Paid Staff

All persons employed to serve in any capacity with children and youth shall:

1. Complete an application form.
2. Provide three character references.
3. Be interviewed by a responsible church staff program coordinator and a second staff or a lay person with responsibility in that area/program.
4. Complete national background check to be reviewed by program director and program director supervisor.
5. Complete Safe Sanctuary and CPR training
6. On persons 18 years and older, criminal checks will be run at least every 3 years, and more often as deemed necessary

II. Selection and Screening of Volunteer Staff

Volunteers serving with children, youth and vulnerable adults shall:

1. Be connected with this congregation or a member of the church for at least six months.
2. If not, then submit references from another church or previous ministry experience as well as a character reference or volunteer will be placed with a worker who is certified through training and screening. In the event of a combined program with another church, an intern program and other similar circumstances, the Senior Minister or his designee may make an exception to the "six month rule." (For example, Wesleyan Interns)
3. For occasional volunteer workers, who volunteer no more than once every six months, a responsible church staff program coordinator will review the information or registration form and be interviewed as deemed necessary. (For example, VBS registration will include any needed information)
4. Complete national background check to be reviewed by the Assistant Director of Children's Ministry or Director of Ministry which submitted the request (ex. Recreation). Results are relayed to requesting program directors after review.
5. Complete Safe Sanctuary training.
6. On persons 18 years and older, criminal checks will be run at least every 3 years, and more often as deemed necessary.

III. Record-Keeping

All information regarding the selection and screening of paid and volunteer staff shall:

1. Be kept on a secure database.
2. Be kept confidential.
3. Be shared only with Ministry Directors involved in the selection and screening of staff or as otherwise required by law.

IV. Training of Paid and Volunteer Staff

The following guidelines shall be implemented regarding the training of paid and volunteer staff who work with children, youth and vulnerable adults:

1. “Safe Sanctuary” Training sessions shall be held throughout the year for all paid and volunteer staff members. Dates and times are to be determined by ministry divisions at the start of programming.
2. Those persons unable to attend the training or who are recruited for service between training sessions shall be directed to online training as well as our written church policy. They will be required to sign a form stating that they have received and read this information and will abide by the policy in place.
3. The training session shall include explanation and discussion of:
 - Safe Sanctuary policies and procedures
 - Guidelines for the prevention of child abuse
 - Behaviors which signal problems related to child abuse
 - Procedures for responding to alleged child abuse
 - Procedures for reporting alleged child abuse
 - Any of above related to vulnerable adults
4. A copy of these policies and procedures shall be provided for each volunteer and paid staff member. Each person will be required to sign a form stating that they have received this information.
5. First Aid and CPR training is required for Paid Staff working with children and youth.
6. Annual Renewal (Review and Acceptance of Safe Sanctuary Policy) will take place online or at a regular training session

V. Procedures and Prevention Guidelines for AFUMC Ministries/Programs

Guidelines for Workers and Volunteers

1. Two Adult Rule – there must always be two adults present.
 - a. An adult is defined as 18 years of age or older.
 - b. There must always be at least one adult 21 years or older present.
 - c. There should be at least 2 unrelated, non-cohabitating adults present at every activity, event or program involving children, youth or disabled adults. This includes every classroom, vehicle or other enclosed areas.
 - d. Both adults must be at least five years older than the oldest child or youth in the room.
2. Activities shall be held in a room which allows for visibility into the room. If not, the door should be left partially open.
3. Adult leaders should keep their phone on their person at all times, for emergency use.
4. Unauthorized visitors will not be allowed to remain with the group.
5. Children and youth shall not be allowed to leave the designated meeting area without permission/supervision.
6. **Only adults** are to be involved in diapering or restroom activity. Standards to be applied:
 - a. Procedures for all workers with children in diapers
 - i. Make sure another adult is in the room when a diaper is being changed.
 - ii. Diapering should occur in a visible area.
 - b. Procedures for all workers with preschool children using restrooms
 - i. If a toilet adjoins the room in use, adults must supervise and the door must remain open, even if just a little.
 - ii. If there has been a potty "accident" and a worker needs to assist a child (changing clothes, clean up, etc.), two adults must be present and a parent may be notified if further cleaning is necessary.
 - c. Procedures for all workers with elementary age children:
 - i. Tell another adult you will be taking children to the restroom.
 - ii. Check the restroom first before sending children into the restroom.
 - iii. Wait in the hallway while the child(ren) use the restroom.
 - iv. Take more than one at a time, allowing children to be as independent as possible.
 - v. Inform the other adult when you have returned.
 - d. Procedures for all workers with youth:
 - i. It is recommended that adults should check restrooms in youth area before activities begin and randomly throughout the event.
 - ii. Youth are encouraged to let an adult know when they go to the restroom area

Guidelines for Parents, Workers, and Children

1. All children through the sixth grade are to be escorted to and from group activities/classes by an authorized parent, guardian or adult. Parents may authorize guardians via Kid Check, the secure check-in system. The same procedure for drop off and pick up applies.
2. Children should only be dropped off at the activities/classes where there are 2 adults in supervision.
3. Children must stay in a supervised area. They should not travel throughout the church building or property without a parent, authorized guardian, or authorized leader or volunteer (two adult leaders or volunteers whenever possible).
4. Children and youth must complete a permission form in order to participate (without parents/guardians) in off campus activities. This form should include a photo release. A medical treatment consent form is also required. All forms must be signed by a parent/guardian.
5. Any medications to be given during an on campus activity must be administered by the parent/guardian or with written parental/guardian permission. Permission forms for medications to be taken during off campus activities must be completed by a parent/guardian. Medications are to be under the control of and administered by an adult leader in charge.
6. Off campus groups will be accessible to parents/guardians by way of staff phone.

VI. Internet and Social Networking Standards

1. Any communication from leadership sent to youth and children should be limited to information related to youth and children ministries.
2. E-mail addresses and phone numbers of youth and children should be protected and not given out under any circumstances.
3. Photographs - Any photos on web sites, posted in classrooms, or posted on bulletin boards should not identify individuals by name.
4. Parent/guardian permission is required for photos/videos of children and youth to be shared on the internet/social media. Parents, volunteers, and staff should refrain from sharing pictures of children other than their own.

It is the responsibility of the program director to ensure parents and volunteers in their ministry area are aware of and compliant with these guidelines.

VII. Standards to be applied specifically to Youth Ministry:

Counseling and/or Meeting with Youth

Counseling or meeting with a youth “to talk” is important in relationship building. If volunteers or leaders find themselves in a situation where a youth wants to “meet with you to talk,” the following guidelines must be considered:

1. Avoid meeting with the opposite gender alone, always encourage them to allow a 2nd adult to take part in the meeting. Meet in an area that is open or an office with a window which allows a view of the meeting.
2. If meeting off-church property, be sure that parents are informed of the meeting.
3. Be sure that the supervising adult leader in ministry is aware of the meeting.
4. Always meet in a public place, like coffee house, restaurant, etc.
5. It is helpful to document meetings and keep in a secure place for your safety and the child’s safety.
6. REMEMBER: It is important to know when you are NOT qualified to meet a person’s needs. Please know when to refer them to professional counseling. A good rule of thumb is: Meet with them no more than 2-3 times and then refer.

Behavior Covenant Expectations for Youth

1. All youth participating in events are expected to sign a behavior covenant, specifically for off-site events. At least one parent and/or guardian is expected to sign this covenant, as well. All parents are also expected to sign this covenant. Virtual signatures are acceptable.
2. If there is a break in the covenant that involves illegal substances including, but not limited to alcohol, vaping, drugs, or weapons of any sort, or if a youth violates the rights and space of another youth to the irresolvable extent, then the youth will be sent home at the parent’s/guardian’s expense.
3. All other actions resulting in a broken covenant will be addressed at the discretion of the ministry leaders.

VIII. Offsite Events

The following program standards to be applied by paid and volunteer staff in children's or youth ministries, when leaving church property:

1. Written permission **must be obtained from parent/ guardian before child/youth leaves with individual(s) or a group on a church sponsored event, with emergency contact information provided.**
2. **Adequate supervision** must be provided for trips, retreats, lock-ins, etc.
 - a. Ratio of adult:1st-6th gr. 1:4-6
 - b. Ratio of adult:7th-8th gr. 1:5-7
 - c. Ratio of adult: 9th-12thgr. 1:6-8
3. **Gender ratio** of leaders shall be in line with gender ratio of children and/or youth.
4. **Trip information**, including location, phone numbers, adults attending, departure and return times must be provided to the parents/guardians before departing.
5. When **sleeping away from home**, in a hotel setting, no adult may sleep in the same room as children or youth. Creative monitoring should be pre-planned and carried out.
6. Two **same-gender adults** may sleep in a room with several children/youth in a bunk setting.
7. Staff should have a plan of what to do in case **of illness or injury.**
8. A **First Aid/CPR** trained person should be available for offsite activities.

IX. Transportation

An event officially begins at check-in for the event. All transportation to the location following the start of registration must be approved by the supervising ministry leader. Official transportation should be as follows:

1. Vehicles must be official church transportation or hired professional buses.
2. If personal vehicles must be used, drivers should have personal insurance and be the driver of those vehicles. If personal vehicles are used to transport youth to off-site location, at least two adults and two children/youth should be present, and youth may not be permitted to drive.
3. Drivers must be 25 years or older to transport children or youth. They must complete the volunteer driver form and sign the safety covenant. All drivers must have a copy of their driver's license on file at the office prior to driving, complete a background check which includes a DMV check, and have also gone through Safe Sanctuaries training prior to transporting children or youth.

X. Lodging Guidelines

1. Hotel Lodging: Youth will be assigned separate rooms from adults. There is a maximum of four students per room. Adults will check that male/female rooms are not connected. It is also recommended that rooms open to the interior of the building, rather than outdoor and rooms be on the second floor.
2. Dorms or Cabin Lodging: There should be at least 2 adults (one at least 21 years of age and both at least 5 years older than the oldest youth) assigned to each lodge. If this cannot be achieved, adult rooms will be in an adjoining space.

XI. Standards to be applied for specifically Recreation Ministries:

Open Facility and Player Parent Responsibilities: Because many other programs often take place when children are present, the church cannot guarantee good intentions of other adults on the premise who may be in restrooms, or other parts of the facility.

1. Parents are responsible for safety and well-being of their participating child as well as player's siblings. All children should stay in designated areas, under supervision. **No child shall be left unsupervised.**
2. Parent or Parent-designated adult is encouraged to remain onsite while child is involved in a team sports activity. If the adult needs to leave church grounds, the coach should be notified of the name of an onsite, designated adult who is responsible for the child in case of emergency. That person should have cell phone number of absent parent. (Exception: When alternative pick-up plans are communicated prior to classes or camps).
3. For optimal safety, restrooms should be checked before children enter.

XII. Standards to be applied for Older Adult Ministries and Offsite Trips

1. Prior to departure of an offsite trip, each participant should complete and sign an Adult Registry form which provides the trip leader with family contacts and personal medical information needed in case of a medical emergency. Forms will be reviewed by the trip leadership and placed in a confidential folder that will be destroyed upon trip completion.
2. The Adult Registry form includes medical conditions, medications taken, family contacts, medical wishes, and doctor's contact information.
3. A trip roster should be left at the church with leader cell phone number.
4. For offsite visits, two unrelated, non-cohabitating adults are recommended.

Procedures for Reporting and Responding to Alleged Child Abuse *

I. Determination of Reasonable Cause to report Child Abuse

It is the policy and position of this church that any person affiliated with AFUMC, who has reasonable cause to believe that a child has been or is being abused as defined by State law (O.C.G.A Section 19-7-5), shall report such abuse.

II. Reporting Procedures

Initial Report: Should any person through their affiliation with this church have reasonable cause to believe that a child has been or is being abused as defined by State law (O.C.G.A Section 19-7-5), whether occurring in a church or non-church related setting, shall act in accordance with the following guidelines:

1. Secure the safety of the child, if possible.
2. Ask no further questions of the child, as the case could be thrown out in a court of law.
3. "Information regarding any accident, incident, or case of suspected abuse should only be discussed with the appropriate church staff members."
4. Make an oral report **immediately** to the immediate supervisor who will the share with the Senior Minister as soon as possible and document any information in writing as soon as possible. Written report shall be signed, dated, and forwarded to the Senior Minister and the Chair of the Response Team.
5. If the Senior Minister is the accused party, notify the District Superintendent and the Chair of the Response Team.
6. *If there is reason to believe a child has been or is being abused*, immediately from the time of the initial report with guidance of supervising ministry leader, make an oral report to DFACs and shall follow with a report in writing.
7. Parents will be notified when it is deemed it will not endanger the welfare of the child.
8. Notify the District Superintendent and Insurance Carrier.

* Child refers to any person under the age of 18

III. Response Team's Procedures

Upon being notified of any allegations of child abuse, the Senior Minister or Chair of the Response Team shall convene a meeting of the Response Team.

1. The Team shall consist of:
 - a. Senior Minister
 - b. Minister or Director of Children/Program
 - c. Minister or Director of Youth
 - d. Member of the Board of Trustees
 - e. Member of the Staff Pastor Parish Relations Committee
 - f. Children's Council Chair
2. Ensure compliance with the reporting requirements of this policy.
3. Coordinate with the Georgia Department of Family and Children's Services (DFACS) or the appropriate police authority or both.
4. Prepare any statements regarding the allegation should there be need to release response to the media, the congregation, or other appropriate parties.
5. Determine the impact of the allegation and develop a plan of ministry to the victim, the accused, their families, and the congregation.
6. Maintain accurate records of its actions.
7. Balance the needs to protect the parties involved in the allegation while fulfilling reporting obligations.

If allegations of child abuse are made, our response will be guided by the following principles:

1. All allegations will be taken seriously.
2. Respect for privacy and confidentiality will be maintained.
3. Victims include the abused, the family of the abused, the peers of the abused, the family of the accused, and the congregation.
4. The needs of the victims will be given high priority.
5. Full cooperation will be given to civil authorities.
6. The SPR chair or another designated individual shall be the church's spokesperson with the media. No other members should make public statements.
7. The Response Team shall keep all reports of alleged child abuse "confidential." Records of reports, including minutes of Response Team's deliberations, interviews with involved parties, and written materials specific to each case are to be kept together by the Senior Minister and marked "Response Team: Confidential" or otherwise required by law.

VI. Procedures for Reporting Accidents, Incidents

A. **Accidents** – when an unintentional act occurs and a child is hurt

1. When an accident occurs, resulting in an injury, administer first aid, or seek medical attention. Within 24 hours, the observer is to complete an *Accident Report Form*, recording details including: the injured party's name, names of others who witnessed accident or applied first aid, time and place accident occurred, and care given.
2. Completed form is to be given to area ministry director.

B. **Incident** – when an action is observed that does not require reporting to Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS), but does require attention

1. If the incident observed does not rise to the level of suspected abuse, an *Incident Report Form* should be completed and given to Ministry Directors, Supervisor, Compliance Officer, and/or Pastors.
2. The staff person over the area where incident was observed, should contact the one whose behavior was inappropriate, discuss alternative behaviors, or to offer support or training.
3. The staff person should indicate on the bottom of the *Incident Report Form* how the situation was resolved.
4. If inappropriate behavior is repeated, further action shall be taken.

Accident and Incident forms will be **completed** within 24 hours and submitted to the Assistant Director of Children's Ministry as soon as possible.