

Child Protection Policy and Procedures for Courthouse Community United Methodist Church

I. Children's Ministry Mission Statement

Courthouse Community UMC strives to provide a safe, spiritual home in which each young person

- Comes to know Christ personally
- Experiences the joy of the Lord
- Develops a strong, Christian foundation

with the objective of inspiring life-long growth in the young person's walk with Christ and a strong relationship with the Church.

II. Purpose

The purposes of this Policy are:

- To help Courthouse Community UMC provide a caring and secure environment for children and youth in all phases of church life.
- To help Courthouse Community UMC reduce its legal risk and liability exposure.

III. Biblical Foundation

Courthouse Community UMC seeks to express God's love of children and provide for their personal wholeness. This caring community seeks to prevent child abuse in any form to our children and youth and to be in ministry to families where abuse may occur. The Bible is the foundation of our understanding upon which all policies, procedures and ministries must stand.

And they were bringing children to him, that He might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it He was indignant, and said to them, "Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." And He took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands upon them.

Mark 20:13-16

Jesus teaches us explicitly that children have the right and the keys to the Kingdom of God. He demonstrates this through blessing and touch. Our goal in response to this Biblical mandate is to maintain a safe, secure and loving place where children and youth may grow and where caregivers, teachers and leaders (both paid & volunteer) minister appropriately to their needs.

IV. Virginia's Child Abuse Law

Under Code of Virginia § 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 impairment of bodily or mental functions. This includes the following: failure to provide care necessary for health, abandonment, commission or allowance of sexual exploitation, endangerment or neglect. Child abuse may be physical, sexual, emotional or mental and may be the result of actions or omissions to act (e.g., lack of care for a child).

Code of Virginia § 83.1-248.3 states that, "Any person licensed to practice medicine or any of the healing arts, any hospital resident or intern, any person employed in the nursing profession, any persons employed as a social worker, any probation officer, 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 regularly planned basis...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 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. (Emphasis is added)

In addition, 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.

V. Types of Child Abuse

A. Definition

Child abuse refers to an act committed by a parent, caregiver or person in a position of trust (even though he/she may not care for the child on a daily basis) which is not accidental, and which harms or threatens to harm a child's physical or mental health or welfare. The following definitions and explanations in this section are from the Virginia Department of Social Services.

B. Types of Abuse

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, bruised, 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 of a one-time critical or severe event that results in a threat to health or safety, such as a toddler left alone.

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. Examples of such abuse are: sexual exploitation, sexual molestation, intercourse/sodomy and other sexual abuse.

4. **Medical Neglect**

Refusal or failure by a 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.

VI. Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse

In an effort to create the safest possible environment within Courthouse Community UMC, several abuse prevention measures will be utilized. These measures include screening of paid and volunteer workers for past child abuse or neglect convictions and founded dispositions of child abuse or neglect, providing regular training on child abuse and neglect issues to paid and volunteer staff, and providing open classrooms.

1. 6-Month Standard

Courthouse Community UMC will strive to utilize only volunteer workers for children or youth in the church that have had continuous active involvement in the church for at least 6 months.

2. Background Screening

Before beginning service, each employed or volunteer worker will need to have a background check done at the expense of the church. Anyone who has had a child abuse conviction or expungement, or founded disposition of child abuse or neglect, as well as anyone refusing to have the background check done, will not be permitted to work with children. In addition, applicants for paid staff positions will undergo a criminal record check with the Department of Social Services. Background checks will be repeated every two years.

3. Policy Awareness & Follow-up Training

Before beginning service, each employed or volunteer worker will be required to read the church's Child Protection Policy and Procedures and sign a form indicating that they have read and that they understand the policy and agree to abide by it. Anyone failing to do so will not be permitted to serve until the policy has been read and the form signed. Follow-up training will be given on an annual basis to reinforce our policy.

4. Two Adult Standard

Courthouse Community UMC will strive to provide two adult supervisors for every group of children or youth. Recruitment of sufficient numbers of volunteers to permit such team staffing will be a primary objective of all church leaders. If a group stays overnight at the church, or if a church sponsored group leaves the premises, two or more leaders should be present and must include at least one male and one female if the group is of mixed gender.

5. Open Classrooms

Classrooms or childcare rooms may be visited without prior notice by church staff, parents, or other volunteer church workers.

6. 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 blocks. WE use the 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 away from the other students. If the child's disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, the child may be taken to and left under the supervision of an age appropriate staff liaison. No physical punishment or verbal abuse, e.g., ridicule, are to be used at any time. If isolating the child in the classroom or removing the child from the classroom becomes necessary, the situation will be discussed with the child's parent(s) or guardian(s) as soon as possible.

7. Annual Review

The Child Protection Policy and Procedures of Courthouse Community UMC shall be reviewed annually by the church staff in consultation with the appropriate church committee.

VII. Reporting Child Abuse

Should there be allegations of child abuse at Courthouse Community UMC, these procedures will be followed:

1. Any allegation(s) of child abuse shall be treated seriously.
2. The Pastor and the Associate Pastor shall be immediately notified and they will immediately begin documenting all procedures observed in the handling of the allegation(s).
3. The Pastor shall immediately notify the District Superintendent.

4. If the allegation(s) involve the Pastor, the chairperson of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee shall be notified immediately in the place of the Pastor. The chairperson shall immediately notify the District Superintendent who shall direct the next steps to be taken in responding to the allegation(s).
5. The Pastor shall immediately notify the Virginia Department of Social Services (800-552-7096) or the Virginia Beach Department of Social Services (757-437-3400) of the allegation(s).
6. The Pastor shall immediately notify the parents of the involved child(ren) or youth(s) unless it is known that the parents already have knowledge of the allegation(s) or the allegation(s) involve conduct of the parent(s).
7. The Pastor shall immediately notify the church's insurance company.
8. Church members and staff who are aware of the allegation(s) shall pray for all persons affected by the allegation(s) and for the church.
9. If the allegation involves a church member, it shall be reported to the Pastor and the chairperson of the Staff-Parish Relations committee, who shall report the allegation to the proper authorities. If the allegation involves volunteers, it shall be reported to the Pastor and any other individual(s) deemed appropriate by the Pastor, including the Assistant to the Pastor, and appropriate actions shall be taken.
10. The Pastor shall extend whatever care and resources are necessary, but under no circumstances should the pastor or any church member investigate the allegation(s). In providing care to the parties involved (the alleged victim and the accused) and their families, the Pastor and church members should not be drawn into a discussion of the truth or falsity of the allegation(s) which could compromise the investigation. No steps to establish or refute the allegation(s) should be taken by the Pastor or any church member.
11. It is appropriate to show care and comfort for the alleged victim(s). This should be the pastoral objective from the moment the allegation(s) is known.
12. All church members and staff involved in these procedures shall observe strict confidentiality until the investigation is complete and appropriate action has been taken.

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