

Safe Sanctuary Policy

Providence United Methodist Church

Introduction

A central tenet of the Christian faith is the inherent value and worth of all children, youth and adults. Children, youth, and disadvantaged and/or elderly adults are least able to protect themselves in our society and are particularly vulnerable to abuse and neglect. Providence United Methodist Church is committed to helping to protect the youth, children, and vulnerable adults who participate in the life of this congregation.

We believe implementing a policy and adopting practices to protect our children recognizes that our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to children and youth. Tragically, Churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse and exploitation occur in Churches, large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural and racial lines. God calls us to make our Churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from abuse.

Safe Sanctuary policies and practices are essential for congregations, not only for the protection and safety of our children and youth, but also for our volunteers and staff working with youth and for the integrity of our witness to the world.

I. Definitions

A. "Paid Staff Person," "Potential Volunteer" and "Screened Adult"

A **Paid Staff Person** is someone paid by the church, overseen by Staff Parish and staff supervisors and screened. A **Potential Volunteer** is someone who has not been screened. They can work in a room with a Screened Adult or Paid Staff Person. A **Screened Adult** is a volunteer who has gone through the screening process. These persons may or may not be members, but they must be regular attendees and active in church activities for at least six months. Exceptions can be made for people with special skills volunteering with children (i.e., Basketball Coach), provided they are with a screened adult. Persons who do not attend our church but wish to be involved in our programming with children must be screened and supervised by a screened adult.

B. **Pastor** is a clergy person under appointment in the United Methodist Church.

C. "Youth Helpers"

A **Youth Helper** is a youth below the age of 18 years assisting with child or youth activities. They can assist with activities but should not be considered a screened adult and should be supervised by Screened Adults.

D. "Child/Youth Abuse"

For purposes of this Policy, **child/youth abuse** includes any of the following:

- 1. Physical Abuse:** Violent non-accidental contact that could result in injury. This includes, but is not limited to, striking, biting, or shaking. Injuries include bruises, fractures, cuts and burns.
- 2. Sexual Abuse:** Sexual activity or inappropriate touching with a child/youth, with perpetrators using force, making threats, or taking advantage of victims.
- 3. Emotional Abuse:** A pattern of intentional conduct which crushes a child's/youth's spirit attacks his/her self-worth through rejection, threats, terrorizing, isolating, or belittling.

II. Screening and Selection of Church Staff and Screened Adults

This policy will be administered by the Executive Director.

The church shall provide training focused on current issues of child protection to by those working with children and youth. Completion of this training shall be **required** of Paid Staff Persons and Screened Adults who work consistently with children and/or youth. In addition, education shall be offered each year to youth, with an emphasis on recognizing inappropriate conduct, resisting, and reporting. After 5 years, the training and background check must be renewed.

- A. Training shall be computer-based and consist of the following:
 - a. Definition of Child Sexual Abuse
 - b. Victim Behavioral Characteristics
 - c. Effects of Child Sexual Abuse
 - d. Characteristics of Child Molesters
 - e. Recognizing Behaviors
 - f. Prevention
 - g. Reporting
 - h. Testing and a signature on a Covenant Statement

- B. Potential Volunteers may visit children and youth programs for a period of 30 calendar days. While visiting Potential Volunteers should wear a visitor nametag and should be in the company of a Screened Adult. After 30 calendar days Potential Volunteers will not be allowed to participate without completing the steps for the appropriate tier above.

- C. Background check results will be viewed primarily by the Executive Director; adverse background checks shall require that additional documentation be gathered by the Executive Director and presented to other pastors and the Chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee as appropriate.

- D. Before beginning work with either children or youth, each Paid Staff Member, Potential Volunteer or Youth Helper will sign the Participation Covenant Statement that they have read, understood, and agree to abide by this Safe Sanctuary Policy. This Covenant Statement must be signed annually.

- E. Where it has been determined that an applicant should **not** work with children or youth, those persons involved with the decision should handle it in a sensitive manner. The Executive Director should inform the applicant in person. The specific reasons for the decision should be given, whenever possible.

- F. All background checks, training certificates, Covenant statements, and medical forms will be kept by the Executive Director.

Safe Sanctuary Practices
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In order to ensure compliance of the Providence United Methodist Church Safe Sanctuary Policy, the following practices should be followed.

Supervision of Children and Youth

A. General Practices

1. All activities involving children and youth will be supervised by at least one screened adult.
2. Children and youth should not be allowed to move freely about the church building.
Children younger than 12 should always be in the care of a screened adult. Youth should be properly supervised.
3. When reasonably feasible, each room set aside for children/youth should have a door with a window. (Windows in doors tend to remove the opportunities for secrecy and isolation, conditions every child abuser seeks). If a door does not have a window then the door should remain open when children are present.
4. One on one contact between adults and children/youth is not permitted. In situations that require personal conferences, the meeting should be conducted in view of other adults and youth.

B. Supervision of Classroom Activities

Two persons in the classroom is the expectation, at least one of them must be a Screened Adult. Children should be escorted to and from bathroom facilities or when otherwise leaving the room by either one of the screened adults or by a designated floating person who checks on classrooms. Where two adults are not available to supervise, the classroom doors are to remain open when a child is present.