

**First United Methodist Church
Child and Youth Safety Policy**

PURPOSE

In following the instructions of our Lord Jesus Christ to "let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Matt. 19:14), it is the purpose of the members and staff of First United Methodist Church, Austin to provide a safe and secure environment for children and youth entrusted to our care. We do this so that all of God's children can experience the grace of God, and grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ.

A safe and secure environment includes a formal, written policy to help prevent and recognize the occurrence of child abuse. The following policy and procedures are for the protection of our preschoolers, children, youth, workers, volunteers and our entire church family at First United Methodist Church (FUMC).

SCOPE

This policy shall apply to all current and future workers and volunteers who supervise the activities of children and youth as sponsored by First United Methodist Church. This policy does not apply to organizations using First United Methodist Church facilities, but have their own governing bodies, such as First United Methodist Preschool and the Boy Scouts of America.

DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of this policy the following definitions shall apply:

1. "Child," "children," "youth," and "minor" is any preschooler, or student enrolled in a primary or secondary education school and/or entrusted to the care of First United Methodist Church by a parent or guardian, regardless of age.
2. "Adult" is any individual at least eighteen (18) years of age no longer in a secondary school and given supervisory authority over a child, children or youth under the care of First United Methodist Church.
3. "Director" is the Director of Youth Ministry and/or the Director of Children's Ministry.
4. "Lay Minister" or "volunteer" is any adult or teen who assists with the children or youth without pay.
5. "Worker" is any adult who is a paid staff member.
6. "Abuse" is generally defined as the mental or physical injury caused to a child, youth or minor; the failure to prevent mental or physical injury caused to a child, youth or minor; sexual conduct harmful to a child, youth or minor; or engaging in

obscenity, alcohol or drug use with a child, youth or minor. "Abuse" is more particularly defined in Sec. 261.001 of the Texas Family Code, a copy of which is attached to this policy.

7. "Neglect" is abandoning a child or youth or failing to provide the necessary and appropriate care or supervision such that the child or youth is at risk for harm while the child or youth is engaged in an activity of FUMC. "Neglect" is more particularly defined in Sec. 261.001 of the Texas Family Code, a copy of which is attached to this policy.

WORKER ENLISTMENT

Workers must:

- 1. Complete an Employment Application;**
- 2. Be provided with the First United Methodist Church Child and Youth Safety Policy;**
- 3. Sign an acknowledgment statement of having received and reviewed the church's Policy for Child and Youth Safety Policy;**
- 4. Complete the Southwest Texas Conference of the UMC Consent for Criminal Background History Check Authorization Form; and**
- 5. Sign an acknowledgment statement of ethical expectations.**

Volunteers must:

- 1. Be provided with the First United Methodist Church Policy on Child and Youth Safety;**
- 2. Sign an acknowledgment of having received and reviewed the First United Methodist Church Policy on Child and Youth Safety;**
- 3. Complete the Children/Youth Worker Application, which is specifically designed for those working with children or youth;**
- 4. Sign an acknowledgment of ethical expectations;**
- 5. Volunteers will be involved in the First United Methodist Church community for a period of at least six months or be known and approved by a member of the church staff;**
- 6. All lay ministers and workers will attend an orientation before they are allowed to work with children or youth unsupervised. Until a lay minister or worker can attend the training he or she will serve in a mentor/apprentice type capacity; and**
- 7. When a worker or lay minister is engaged to work with children, they will be photographed and those records will be kept in the worker's or lay minister's file.**

If there is credible evidence to believe that any prospective worker/lay minister has engaged in child abuse, sexual abuse (whether against a child or another adult), other felony or crime of moral turpitude within the past 10 years, or has an active problem with drug abuse or alcohol abuse or has had such a drug or alcohol abuse problem in the recent past, then that prospective worker or lay minister will not be allowed to serve in the FUMC ministry to youth or children.

In exceptional circumstances where the prospective worker or lay minister would not have direct and sole care of any child or youth, the prospective worker or lay minister may petition the church staff for reconsideration, must furnish compelling evidence of rehabilitation and must submit to monitoring by the staff. The pastoral staff shall be involved in any such reconsideration and at least one member of the pastoral staff must consent before the application of the prospective worker or lay minister is approved.

CRIMINAL BACKGROUND and DRIVING RECORD CHECKS

All workers will have a criminal background check performed and shall have their driving records checked before being allowed to drive in the course and scope of their employment with FUMC.

The Southwest Texas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church will be the agency through which we submit requests for criminal background check information. Requests for driving records will be submitted to the Texas Department of Public Safety (or to the prior home state driving records bureau if the employee has maintained a Texas driver's license for less than three years). The Annual Conference will be the resource to obtain police or law enforcement background check to the extent that they are requested.

Only (a) the Episcopal Office, (b) District Superintendent in the appropriate District, (c) the pastor and the SPRC of the local church, or (d) the person in charge of the District and Conference events, may request and be privy to the information, as the information is subject to the reporting requirements set out below. The Conference Office will report only relevant information as it pertains to the safety of children, youth and adults to the requesting party. All persons requiring the background check will provide the following information:

- 1. Full name including previous names and nicknames;**
- 2. Present address;**
- 3. SSN and Driver's license number;**
- 4. Employment history for the past five (5) years;**
- 5. Volunteer work for the past five (5) years;**
- 6. Experience and skills specifically related to the position;**

7. Church membership;
8. Personal references (not related to applicant) with complete addresses and telephone numbers and e-mail addresses, if available;
9. Consent to verify all the information, and to obtain a police background check, if lawfully available to the church or sponsored event;
10. Statement that the person has never been convicted of a criminal sexual offense or a felony of any nature; and
11. Statement that the information is true and correct.

All prospective lay ministers who will be supervising children or youth or who will be driving a vehicle with children or youth as passengers during FUMC sponsored events must undergo a criminal background check with the Texas Department of Public Safety. They shall also have their driving records checked before being allowed to drive with children or youth as passengers. Requests for driving records will be submitted to the Texas Department of Public Safety (or to the prior home state driving records bureau if the employee has maintained a Texas driver's license for less than three years). Once the person is approved as a lay minister, the background check and/or driving records check will not need to be repeated unless the church has good cause to suspect that the person's status has changed.

All sections of applications and any background check returns will be kept in a file in the church office. Access to these files will be limited to those who reasonably need to know the information within the files.

TRAINING FOR WORKERS AND VOLUNTEERS

Each worker and lay minister will be given the legal definition of child abuse/neglect in writing, as well as the policy or the church on the reporting of child abuse and or neglect. Workers and lay ministers will also be required to attend a training session where they will view child abuse prevention video(s) and/or receive training materials on this subject to help them gain an appreciation for the reality of the concern. This will help workers and lay ministers identify child abuse and or neglect in the future if they see signs of it, as well as help them to report it to the proper authorities.

SPECIFIC ACTS AND OMISSIONS IN VIOLATION OF THE POLICY

The following specific acts or omissions and others of a similar nature are violations of this Policy and will not be tolerated or accepted during any activity or program and are to be immediately reported to the appropriate program staff after the safety of the child, children or youth involved has been assured. When a report is made to the appropriate program staff member that staff member will determine the necessary action. If there is credible evidence to believe that any lay minister or

worker has engaged in any of the following, that person will be dismissed from working with children or youth:

- * Sexual activity (beyond expressions of affection normally accepted in public) in the presence of, or in association with, a child or youth.
- * Abuse as defined within this policy or as defined within the Texas Family code attached hereto.
- * Neglect as defined within this policy or as defined within the Texas Family code attached hereto.
- * Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between any worker or lay minister and a child or youth.
- * Intentional injury to, or physically abusive behavior toward, a child or youth.
- * Mental or emotional abuse of a child, children or youth. This includes the use of language which is so inappropriate as to cause harm to a child or youth. Milder verbal abuse is grounds for reprimand, training and closer monitoring by FUMC.
- * The possession of obscene or pornographic materials or the display of sexually inappropriate materials at any function of FUMC involving children or youth.
- * Possessing or being under the influence of any illegal substances.
- * The possession, consumption of and /or being under the influence of alcohol or other intoxicants while leading or participating in a children's or youth function at First United Methodist Church.

WORKER and LAY MINISTER REVIEW

Workers and lay ministers must annually receive additional training/review on the risk of child abuse and the prevention of the same. The prevention video and/or training materials should be reviewed in an organized fashion by all church workers and lay ministers, and documentation of each person's participation in the initial orientation and the annual review should be placed in the individual's personnel file insuring that the church regularly provided an awareness program of this problem.

POLICIES FOR WORKING DIRECTLY WITH CHILDREN OR YOUTH

1. Plans will be made for a minimum of two adults present for all children's or youth activities. At least one of these adults must have attended the orientation. If, for some reason only one adult is present, there must be visibility into the room at all times.
2. Activities away from the church such as retreats, outings, and other activities sponsored by the church may occur. Plans will be made to have a minimum of two adults present.

- 3. Coed overnight activities require unrelated male and female adult sponsors, without exception.**
- 4. There will be a minimum of two adults present in each childcare room. All childcare workers will be current in First Aid and Infant/Child CPR.**
- 5. We recognize the value of one on one ministry with children and youth, and the value of one adult with a small group of children or youth. These activities will not occur on a regular basis without the parents of the children/youth being informed of the ministry. If the activity takes place at the church, the classroom door shall remain open or the door, if closed, shall have a window which is not obstructed during the event.**
- 6. Transportation to and from church activities is done in the church vehicle and /or by private vehicles. All drivers of children/youth must meet the requirements set for church drivers including a valid driver's license, proof of insurance at the State minimum limits, be at least 21 years of age, and not be otherwise disqualified from driving (i.e. under medication likely to affect driving skills, etc.) The person's driving record must be on file with the church and must be acceptable. Only approved drivers may drive the church vehicle. The church Business Administrator maintains this list. Parental permission for the transport of each child/youth shall be required and will be kept on file in the church office or may be requested for each individual event.**
- 7. Elementary aged children may go the restroom in pairs, without an adult. An adult must accompany children 2 1/2 to 5 years of age. More specific information on this procedure will be covered at the orientation.**
- 8. Children though elementary school will be released at the end of Sunday School, choir or other activities to the adult who brought them to the event unless prior arrangements are made between the parent and teacher. Infants and children in childcare will only be released to the parent or adult following positive identification.**
- 9. Adults and youth who are supervising youth and children may not date any of the youth or children being supervised.**

REPORTING AND RESPONDING TO ABUSE

A worker or lay minister having cause to believe that a child's physical or mental health or welfare has been adversely affected by abuse or neglect by any person is obligated by Texas law to immediately make a report to a law enforcement agency or to the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (TDPRS) Child Abuse Hotline (800-252-5400).

If a worker or lay minister is in doubt regarding whether a report should be made, he or she shall telephone the agency and discuss the situation with a

counselor to determine whether a report should be made. This call may be made anonymously. A worker or lay minister shall make a written record of the name and the title of the counselor with whom he or she spoke and the recommendation made by the counselor.

Notification to Pastor/Chair of PPR Committee

- 1. A lay minister/worker who becomes aware of any abuse with any ministry activity shall, in addition to any reporting required above by state law, immediately report the incident or suspicions to the appropriate Director or Pastor of First United Methodist Church. If the allegation is in relation to the Pastor the lay minister/worker is to contact the chairperson of the Pastor Parish Relations Committee.**
- 2. Should child abuse allegations occur, lay ministers/workers involved shall, in addition to the mandatory reporting to TDPRS and the appropriate director or pastor:**
 - * Respond to each allegation in a serious manner;**
 - * Treat each allegation with confidentiality and respect for the privacy of all involved persons;**
 - * Cooperate fully with civil authorities; and**
 - * Extend genuine care to all victims of child abuse.**

Responding to the Report

- 1. When someone receives a report of an incident of abuse, he or she shall immediately take all steps necessary to ensure the safety of the all parties involved.**
- 2. The person reporting the incident and the one to whom they reported shall talk to the Senior Pastor or the Chairperson of PPRC and take the appropriate actions including:**
 - * Reporting to TDPRS;**
 - * Ministering to the victim and their family as necessary;**
 - * Removing the accused from the situation until the allegations are investigated and resolved;**
 - * Offer support to the accused and their family as necessary; and**
 - * Follow guidelines as set by the FUMC legal counsel, insurance and others representing the church as deemed necessary by the Senior Pastor.**

LAY MINISTER/WORKER ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I understand that I am to report as soon as practical any accidents, injuries, neglect or abuse to children, youth, other sponsors or myself, and/or violations of this policy, to one of the appropriate Directors or to an ordained minister of First United Methodist Church.

I understand that I am required by law to report known or suspected instances of child abuse and that my failure to do so may result in my being charged with or convicted of a crime. I agree to follow the policy of First United Methodist Church and state law on reporting child abuse or molestation. I acknowledge that I have received and read a copy of the Child and Youth Safety Policy of First United Methodist Church.

I understand the policy of First United Methodist Church is to cooperate with the authorities in the investigation of suspected child abuse and molestation situations. I, as a lay minister or worker, agree to cooperate with the investigation as requested.

Sponsor/Volunteer Signature

Date

Director/Pastor Signature

Date

WORKER'S and LAY MINISTER'S STATEMENT

I understand the church needs to check my background.

The information contained in this screening form or any other application for service with youth and/or children is correct to the best of my knowledge. I authorize any references to give you any information, including opinions they may have regarding my character and fitness for work with children and youth. In consideration of the receipt and evaluation of this application by First United Methodist Church, I hereby release any individual, church, youth organization, charity, employer, reference, or any other person or organization, including record custodians, both collectively and individually, from any and all liability for damages of whatever kind or nature which may at any time result to me, my heirs, or family, on account of compliance or any attempts to comply with this authorization. I waive any right that I may have to inspect any information provided about me by any person or organization identified by me in this screening form.

Should my application be accepted, I agree to be bound by the Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church and Policies of First United Methodist Church and state law and to refrain from improper, illegal or unethical conduct in the performance of my services on behalf of First United Methodist Church.

I further state that I have carefully read the forgoing release and know the contents thereof; and sign this release as my own free will.

This is a legally binding agreement, which I have read and understand.

Worker's Signature

Date

Witness Signature

Date