

# SAFE SANCTUARIES

## Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church

Mandatory Standards for Local Churches in the Kentucky Annual Conference

### PREAMBLE

God has called us to make our ministries safe, protecting our children, youth and vulnerable adults from abuse and exploitation. God has also called us to create communities of faith where children, youth and vulnerable adults can be safe and grow strong.

Jesus taught that *“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me,”* (Mark 9:37 NRSV) and *“If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones...it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea.”* (Matthew 18:6 NRSV).

The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church state that *“...children must be protected from economic, physical, and sexual exploitation and abuse.”*

At each child’s baptism, we affirm our responsibility to their safety by our congregational response, pledging:

*“With God’s help, we will so order our lives after the example of Christ, that this child, surrounded by steadfast love, may be established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal.”* (From The Book of Worship, Baptismal Covenant, Congregational Pledge II)

Building on these foundations, we recognize that our faith calls us to offer hospitality and protection to all children, youth and vulnerable adults, as well as those who are committed to ministering to them as volunteers and employees. Every 15 seconds, a child is abused or neglected. Often, abuse occurs in places where children and youth feel safe – homes, schools, camps, and even churches. In over three quarters of reported cases, the victim was related to or acquainted with the abuser. In light of this, the Kentucky Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church has seen fit to outline policy and procedures that can 1) prevent such abuse from happening in our churches; 2) be a place where children can feel safe in disclosing abuse; and 3) protect the loyal volunteers and employees that minister to our children, youth and vulnerable adults.

This policy sets forth the **MANDATORY** requirements in the areas of ;

- 1) Screening,
- 2) Supervision,
- 3) Reporting, and
- 4) Response Plan.

## **DEFINITIONS:**

“**Abuse**” means harm or a threat of physical or emotional harm to a child or vulnerable adult or by a parent, guardian, or other person. Abuse includes: (a) the infliction of physical or emotional injury by other than accidental means; (b) the creation of a risk, or allowing the creation of risk, to a child by other than accidental means; (c) committing or allowing to be committed an act of sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or prostitution upon the child.

"**Child**" or “**children**” or “**youth**” means any person who has not reached his/her eighteenth birthday.

"**Exploitation**" means obtaining or using another person's resources, including but not limited to funds, assets, or property, by deception, intimidation, or similar means, with the intent to deprive the person of those resources.

"**Sexual abuse**" includes, but is not necessarily limited to, any contacts or interactions in which the parent, guardian, or other person uses or allows, permits, or encourages the use of the child for the purposes of the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or another person.

"**Sexual exploitation**" includes, but is not limited to, a situation in which a parent, guardian, or other person allows, permits, or encourages the child to engage in an act which constitutes prostitution under Kentucky law; or a parent, guardian, or other person having custodial control or supervision of a child or responsible for his/her welfare, allows, permits, or encourages the child to engage in an act of obscene or pornographic photographing, filming, or depicting of a child as provided for under Kentucky law.

“**Supervision**” means to oversee or direct a ministry or activity.

"**Vulnerable Adult**" means a person eighteen (18) years of age or older who, because of a mental or physical dysfunction, is unable to manage his/her own resources, carry out the activity of daily living, or protect himself/herself from neglect, exploitation, or a hazardous or abusive situation without assistance from others.

## SCREENING PROCEDURES:

Careful screening is one way to prevent the abuse and exploitation of children, youth and vulnerable adults. It can be time consuming and expensive, but well worth the effort in peace of mind that the most reliable, committed and experienced staff and volunteers are in place for every program that involves children, youth and vulnerable adults.

1. **All staff and volunteers who have regular and direct contact with children, youth and vulnerable adults shall be required to fill out a Background Screening Form that shall include but is not limited to:**
  - a. Standard contact information
  - b. Experience/qualifications for the position
  - c. Voluntary disclosure of past criminal history, including any criminal charges and/or convictions
  - d. Waiver of confidentiality allowing the church to secure the background checks and references necessary.
  - e. Listing of 2 non-relative references. This list shall have complete contact information for all references. This portion of the application process is considered incomplete if full contact information for the references is not provided.
2. Background screening:
  - a. Minimum --- Kentucky state background check.
  - b. Recommended – National background check.
  - c. National background check is highly recommended if the person has lived outside the state and/or lives near the border of another state.

*Note:* Clergy serving in the Kentucky Annual Conference will undergo a background screening upon entrance into the conference and once during each quadrennium when they participate in a mandatory boundaries/safe sanctuaries training sponsored by the conference. This documentation will be kept in the personnel files of the conference.
3. Persons who have a break in volunteer or paid service of one or more years shall resubmit the Background Screening Form. It is recommended that background checks be repeated at least every three years for all staff and volunteers.
4. It is important that all records be kept in a locked cabinet. There should be a system in place that gives those who need these records easy access and a safe place to be stored when they are not needed. It is recommended that these records be kept by the church in perpetuity.
5. Persons shall demonstrate an active relationship with the local church for at least six months before being allowed to be in a supervisory role in activities for children, youth or vulnerable adults. In the case of new staff hires, references deemed adequate by the hiring supervisor will replace the six-month waiting period.

## **SUPERVISION:**

Supervision procedures are designed to reduce the possibility of abuse or exploitation of children, youth or vulnerable adults, and to protect staff persons and volunteers from unfounded accusations.

1. **Training** is a requirement for all staff and volunteers working with children, youth and vulnerable adults. An initial educational component of the Safe Sanctuaries programs and policies is required prior to any adult having direct supervision of children/youth/vulnerable adults. Thereafter, the minimum training would include documentation of an annual review of the Safe Sanctuaries policies, procedures for supervision, and current information on how to identify and report child or vulnerable adult abuse.
2. Minimum supervisory standards will include the “**two adult rule**”. The two adult rule requires that, regardless of the size of the group, there will always be two unrelated adults present. This may include the presence of an adult ‘roamer’ who moves in and out of rooms/ ministry activities.
3. **No child, youth or vulnerable adult will be left unsupervised** while attending a ministry activity/event.
4. **All ministry activities should occur in open view.** Each room or space where ministry activities/events occur must be open to public view. For example: enclosed spaces such as classrooms shall have a viewing window, a glass panel in the door, a ½ door configuration or an open door.
5. Registration materials should be collected for every ministry event.
6. Ministry events involving transportation shall require written/ signed permission from parents/ guardians.
7. No person shall supervise an age group unless he/she is AT LEAST 18 years of age or older and is AT LEAST 4 years older than the children/youth being supervised.

## REPORTING:

Reporting is required by any staff or a volunteer that personally witnesses an incident of abuse or exploitation, when an allegation of an event of abuse or exploitation is made to staff or a volunteer by a third party and/or when a child or vulnerable adult discloses abuse or exploitation to staff or a volunteer. It is crucial that reporting be immediate and the allegations dealt with as soon in time as possible to the incident or disclosure.

1. The staff person or volunteer who observes alleged abuse or to whom such alleged abuse is reported or disclosed, or who suspects abuse is required to report the incident/suspected abuse **immediately** to the person in charge of the ministry/activity. Upon receiving such information, the person in charge of the ministry/activity shall **immediately** call the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS) at (877) 597-2331, the local CHFS office or the Kentucky State Police. The Pastor in charge and immediate staff supervisor are to be informed immediately before or subsequent to the making of a report.
2. The person in charge of the ministry/activity in which the alleged abuse was observed or disclosed shall immediately attempt to obtain necessary information such as the name of the alleged victim and his/her address and family information.
3. If the accused is the appointed clergy, supply pastor or a member of his/her family, the allegations shall be immediately reported to the District Superintendent. The District Superintendent shall immediately report to the proper authorities as set forth in paragraph 1 above. The District Superintendent will take responsibility and act according to established rules of The Book of Discipline with respect to claims against a pastor. If the District Superintendent is not available, the incident should be reported to the Bishop's office in Crestwood.
4. All clergy are included in mandatory reporting as required by The Book of Discipline and Kentucky state law.

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*All clergy of The United Methodist Church are charged to maintain all confidences inviolate, including confessional confidences, except in the cases of suspected child abuse or neglect or in cases where mandatory reporting is required by civil law.*

5. After the person in charge of the ministry/activity has reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the appointed clergy/supply pastors are to report the incident immediately to the District Superintendent. If the District Superintendent is unavailable, the incident should be reported to the Bishop's office.
6. The person in charge of the ministry/event must keep a written report of the steps taken by the Church in response to the reported abuse. The report should be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It should be kept in a secure place. It should be written in ink or typed to prevent it from being changed.

## RESPONSE PLAN:

A quick, compassionate and unified response to an alleged incident of abuse is expected. All allegations will be taken seriously. In all cases of reported or observed abuse there shall be cooperation with all official investigating agencies.

1. All media requests for statements should be directed to the Pastor in charge who shall be in contact with his/her District Superintendent. A spirit of cooperation in helping the media find the “official spokesperson” is often helpful.
2. Immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the accused, remove the accused from further involvement with children or vulnerable adults and advise the accused there has been an allegation of abuse. Details of the allegations of the abuse should not be discussed with the accused at the time of removal. In any removal of a staff member or volunteer from any activity/ministry, care should be taken to handle the removal in a discreet manner, recognizing that there will be an investigation by either state or church authorities, or both.
3. When it has been alleged that a member of the church staff or a volunteer, has committed an act of abuse or exploitation, the staff member or volunteer shall be required to refrain from all ministry activities/events with children, youth and vulnerable adults until the incident has been fully resolved by the appropriate state authorities and/or in accordance with Book of Discipline.
4. Notify the parents of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety and well being of the child or youth until the parent(s) arrive. **NOTE:** If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, follow the advice of the authorities concerning notification of others.
5. Take all allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim’s family. Show care and support to help prevent further hurt. Extend whatever pastoral resources are needed. Remember that the care and safety of the victim is the **first** priority. Respond in a positive and supportive manner to the victim and the victim’s family.
6. The church should provide a supportive atmosphere to all those who are affected, offering both objectivity and empathy as it seeks to create a climate in which healing can take place.