



**CHILD / YOUTH
PROTECTION POLICY
ADOPTED: 1-8-2005
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Child and Youth Protection Policy

Lakeside Fellowship United Methodist Church Sanford, Florida

Introduction

A central tenet of the Christian faith is the inherent value and worth of all children, youth, and adults. Children and youth are least able to protect themselves in our society and are particularly vulnerable to abuse and neglect. The Lakeside Fellowship United Methodist Church is desirous of doing what it can to protect the youth and children who participate in the life of this congregation.

We believe implementing a policy and adopting procedures to protect our children recognizes that:

Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to the little ones, the Children. The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church states that “. . . children must be protected from economic, physical and sexual exploitation and abuse.” Tragically, Churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, and exploitation. . . occur in Churches, both, 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.

Child abuse prevention and Ministry Protection policies and procedures 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.

The Gospel calls us to be engaged in ministry with children and youth. We should not allow the risks to undermine or stop our ministry. Rather, we must:

- *Acknowledge the risks and develop a practical plan to address these issues:*
- *Take steps to prevent harm to our children; and*

Continue to answer the Gospel's imperative to be in ministry with children, thus making a difference in their lives.

I. Definitions

A. “Child” and “Youth” and “Adult”

Following the public school system, a “child” is anyone age of 11 or under. A “youth” is anyone not a “child” and under the age of 18. An adult is anyone 18 years of age or older.

B. “Paid Staff Person,” “Adult Volunteer,” and “Screened Adult”

A **Paid Staff Person** is someone paid by the church, overseen by Staff Parish and screened. An **Adult 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. A regular attendee is someone who would be missed if they were not in attendance in church.

C. Youth Helpers - Youth below the age of 18 years assisting with child or youth activities. They can assist with activities but should not be considered an adult volunteer and should be supervised themselves.

D. “Child/Youth Abuse”

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

1. Physical Abuse:

Violent non-accidental contact which results in injury. This includes, but is not limited to, striking, biting, or shaking. Injuries include bruises, fractures, cuts, and burns.

2. Sexual Abuse:

Any form of sexual activity with a child/youth, whether at the Church, at home, or any other setting. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent, or another minor.

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.

E. “Regularly”:

A screened adult volunteer who works with children or youth two weeks a month or more, and has finished the training programming as outlined in this policy.

II. Screening and Selection of Church Staff and Adult Volunteers

“The Pastor and the Staff Parish Relations Committee are charged with the responsibility of developing, implementing and evaluating the process for recruiting, screening, selecting, training and supervising of non-appointive church staff and adult volunteers.” (¶258.12 2008 Book of Discipline)

- A. Adult volunteers who regularly work with the Church’s children and youth and each church paid staff person will be screened. Those who work regularly with children/youth will be trained on child protection issues prior to beginning their regular involvement with children and youth. The procedures for screening are as follows: Each person being considered to work regularly with children and/or youth, whether as a volunteer or paid staff person, shall fill out an application form (See Appendix I). Re-screening will be repeated for all that work / volunteer with Children and or Youth every 5 years unless there is an incident that warrants a re-screening before the end of the 5 year period.
- B. Before placing the applicant in a position of responsibility with children or youth, a designated paid staff member or other person charged with specific responsibility will interview the applicant reviewing with them the written application. (See Appendix II)

- C. The person conducting this interview will review the references (See Appendix XII) provided on the application form and contact any additional persons as the circumstances dictate. A written record of such contacts will be retained with the application form (See Appendix III).
- D. Each person that has interviewed (as defined above) and has been found by LakeSide Fellowship UMC to potentially work with children and/or youth shall “authorize” the church to conduct a criminal background check. At a minimum, the background check will include the one offered by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. **The Conference Department of Ministry Protection also offers a national criminal background screening program (www.flumc.org/MinistryProtection)**
- For persons who have not lived in Florida for the past five years, a national background check will be conducted (See Appendix IV).
- E. Before beginning work with either children or youth, each paid staff member and volunteer will sign the Participation Covenant Statement. By signing this form they are affirming that they have read, understood, and agree to abide by this Child and Youth Protection Policy (See Appendix V).
- F. After the interview an applicant may or may not be accepted to work with youth and/or children. A background check will be accomplished before any paid staff member or adult volunteer will be allowed to work with youth and/or children.
- G. 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 appointed staff member or her/his designee should inform the applicant in person. The specific reasons for the decision should be given, whenever possible.
- H. Although not required to personally accomplish the above tasks, the appointed clergy and supply pastors shall be responsible for ensuring compliance with subparagraphs (A) through (G) above.

III File and Record Keeping

- A. All records will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the Children’s Ministries directors’ office.
- B. Senior Pastor and Children’s Director shall have keys for file cabinet.
- C. Access to file cabinet shall only be allowed to Senior Pastor and Children’s Director.
- D. Records are to be kept on church property at all times. Any records taken out during business hours must be returned by the end of the day.
- E. Records will have the following table of contents:
- a. Form dates / renewal dates
 - b. General Information
 - c. Application
 - d. References

- e. Background check
 - f. Interview
 - g. Policy Training
 - h. Covenant Statement
 - i. In-Service Report
- F. All forms in file are located in appendix (list number or letter)
- G. Records will be kept for a period of 5 years. After such time records will be shredded.
- H. If a staff or volunteer leaves the church there records will be destroyed after a period of 3 months. If a person returns to the church after the 3 month period they will need to repeat the whole screening process.
- I. Dated sign-in and sign-out sheets will be used for all children's programs where the child is not accompanied by their parent (Appendix X). These sheets will be kept for a period of one year then destroyed.

IV. Maintaining Screened Adult Status

The Church shall ensure that regularly scheduled (i.e., at least annually) training focused on current issues of child protection is available to and received by those working with children and youth. Attendance at this training shall be required of all paid staff members, screened and non-screened adult volunteers who work regularly with children and/or youth.

1. The training should include but not limited to:
 - A. The definition and recognition of child abuse.
 - B. The Church's policy and procedures on child abuse and the reasons for having them.
 - C. The need to maintain a positive classroom environment, including appropriate discipline and age-level characteristics.
 - D. The appropriate behavior for teachers and leaders of child/youth events.
 - E. Abuse reporting responsibilities and procedures.
 - F. Definition of appropriate interpersonal boundaries.
 - G. Training will take place with seminar's, handouts and or videos.
2. Maintaining Screened adult status must yearly include the following:
 - a. Attending offered yearly training and filling out an in-service report (See Appendix XI).
 - b. Annual signing of the Covenant Statement (See Appendix V).
 - c. Having background screening completed every 5 years.

V. Supervision of Children and Youth

A. General Rules

1. All activities involving children and youth will be supervised by at least one screened adult.
2. When reasonably feasible, each room set aside for children/youth should have a door with a window.

3. The “Two Person Rule” is defined as having at least two people in any “child” classroom or setting with more than 10 children present, one of which must be a screened adult volunteer or staff person.

B. Supervision of Classroom Activities

1. Crib/Toddler to Second Grade

At least one **screened** adult will be present for all classroom activities involving infants, toddlers, and children in grades K-2. When deemed necessary by the paid ministry staff leader there should be two **screened** adults present, and where the two adults are family members, it is preferable that a third adult be present. In addition, a designated person should periodically check each classroom and restroom. One adult must be a screened adult.

2. Grades 3-5

At least one **screened** adult will be present for all classroom activities. In addition, a designated person should periodically check each classroom. Children, when possible, should be escorted to and from bathroom facilities or when otherwise leaving the room by a supervising adult. In addition, a designated person should periodically check each classroom and restroom. The classroom doors are to remain open if the classroom door does not have glass.

3. Grades 6-12

At least one screened adult will be present for all classroom activities. A designated person should periodically check all classrooms. Any one-to-one meeting shall be conducted in a public place or in a room with an open door where there’s regular, human traffic.

C. Open Door Policy

Parents, volunteers or staff of the church will be permitted, as reasonableness dictates, to visit and observe all programs and classrooms at any time.

D. Sign-in/Sign-out Procedure

Adults responsible for children who are infant through toddler should sign-in their child and indicate the names of the authorized person(s) to whom the child may be signed-out. Adults responsible for children age 2 through first grade should sign their child in and out of Sunday School and other children’s activities. Picking-up children by non-authorized adults is forbidden.

E. Supervision of Off-Site Activities

At least two screened adults will be present for all off-site activities involving children and/or youth. Any meetings held in an individual’s home will be supervised by at least two adults who are not members of the same family. Meetings held in an individual’s home must be pre-approved by the child’s/youth’s parent or guardian.

F. Counseling of Youth and Children

In instances of youth or child counseling where circumstances dictate that counseling would be most effective on a one-on-one basis, an appropriate church paid staff person or designee may meet individually with a youth with the knowledge of at least one other paid staff member. If a designee counsels a youth on a one-on-one basis, the staff member responsible for that ministry area shall be notified in advance. At any counseling session with children or youth, the door of the room used should remain open for the entire session, unless there is glass in the door or wall which gives a clear view into the room. If another adult is not in the building when the counseling occurs, a meeting at the church cannot happen and the session will be moved to in a public place, such as a restaurant or outside where other people are present. **NOTE 1: At the initial meeting, the designee should first determine if they are qualified to address the child's/youth's needs effectively. After three sessions a conscious effort to refer the youth or child to another more qualified counselor should be considered.** **NOTE 2: This is not meant to govern a licensed professional counselor in a paid counseling relationship with a child or youth.**

G. Time Following Group Events

Following child/youth group events, it is inevitable that occasionally a child's/youth's transportation arrive after all other participants have departed. In those circumstances, a child/youth may unavoidably be supervised by one screened adult. Under these circumstances, the general rule requiring the presence of two screened adults is suspended and the screened adult and/or paid staff should make all efforts to contact paid staff or another paid staff member to inform them of the situation. The screened adult is responsible for exercising his/her best judgment for the participant's well-being.

VI. Transportation

A. General Rules

Transporting **children and youth** is an important concern. Their safety can be at risk in a variety of ways. Therefore, certain discretion must be used depending upon the event attended, the locale of the event, and the age group participating. This Policy includes both Requirements and Guidelines. When feasible, there should be adherence to the recommendations in the Guidelines. It is expected that the Requirements will always be followed.

B. Requirements

1. Drivers or the drivers company must be known to the designated adult leader of the event.
2. When a child/youth is transported in any vehicle for any official event, the driver must be either the child's/youth's parent/guardian, or a screened adult or a paid staff person who is at least 21 years old.
3. When a child/youth is transported in a church-owned vehicle, the driver must be at least 21 years of age; provided, however, exception is made when the driver is a

paid staff member who is at least 21 years of age and for whom a motor vehicle record search has been made and the record has been found by the Appointed clergy and supply pastors or his/her designee to be satisfactory.

4. Drivers must have a valid driver's license for the vehicle being operated. For example, if driving a church bus, a commercial license is required. A copy of the driver's license and insurance should be on file at the church.
5. Drivers must require that seat belts be used at all times and the number of passengers must not exceed the number of seat belts.
6. Drivers should be advised of a designated route and should not deviate from it except in cases of emergency, road detours, or at the knowledge of the designated leader.
7. **Drivers should not use cell phones unless required for communication with other drivers and should not text message while driving.**
8. When there is reason to believe it would not be safe for a youth to ride in a vehicle driven by another youth, the adults responsible should intervene and take reasonable steps to make alternative arrangements for all concerned. No youth will be allowed to drive his/her automobile during an official youth event.
9. When a trip is planned and the destination is expected to be 100 miles or more from the point of departure, drivers are to be listed on an "approved driver list" maintained in the church office.
10. Persons who regularly drive church owned vehicles are to be listed on an "approved driver list" maintained in the church office.
11. In order to be listed on the "approved driver list" of drivers, a Motor Vehicle Record search must be conducted and the appointed clergy and supply pastors or his/her designee must determine if the record is satisfactory. A Drivers Application may also be required. (See Appendix IX)
12. Drivers will read and sign an acknowledgement form indicating that the Child Protection Policy has been read and will be followed (See Appendix IV).

C. Guidelines

1. Drivers should be accompanied by at least one other adult when possible.
2. Drivers should receive training for the church owned vehicle being operated.

VI. Trip and Retreat Supervision

Trip and Retreat settings can call for different child/youth protection requirements depending on the circumstances. What follows are Requirements and Guidelines of this Policy. The Requirements should always be implemented. Depending on the circumstances of the setting, who is in attendance, etc., some or all of the Guidelines should be implemented. Those in charge of the trip or retreat should be mindful of both Requirements and Guidelines, in addition to applying their own wisdom to the needs of a given occasion.

D. Requirements

1. There will be at least two **screened** adults present for all trips, retreats and other events where the children and/or youth gather overnight at, or away from, the church campus.

2. There will be at least one **screened** adult for each gender present at co-ed overnight events. At single gender overnight events, at least one of the two screened adults present shall be of the same gender as the child/youth.
3. The person in charge of youth/children for each overnight trip and/or retreat shall carry parental permission slips including permission for emergency medical care. (See Appendix VI)

E. Guidelines

In a hotel type setting, rooms should be assigned as follows:

1. Separate rooms for adults and child/youth should be assigned with at least two children/youth per room.
2. Assignments should be made so that an adult room is between two children/ youth rooms.
3. Adults should make random monitoring hall trips and room checks at night by two adults of the same gender as those being checked.
4. A hotel should be selected where the rooms open to the interior of the building (i.e., do not open to the outside).

F. On-line Safety

It is acknowledged that the use of computers and other electronic means of communications may be useful tools in supporting child and youth ministries. However, it should also be recognized that these forms of communication also potentially pose a unique risk.

Church computers that are set up for guests or program participants to access the internet should be in high-traffic places and randomly monitored by staff. Controls should be in place to prevent access to inappropriate content.

VIII. Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

Florida Statute 39.201 entitled "Mandatory Reports" states that: "*Any person who knows, or has reasonable cause to suspect, that a child is abused, abandoned, or neglected by a parent, legal custodian, caregiver, or other person responsible for the child's welfare, as defined in this chapter, . . . shall report such knowledge or suspicion to the department*"

While the statute is limited to situations involving abuse by a parent, custodian, caregiver or other persons responsible for a child's welfare, the moral imperative to protect children extends to other situations where abuse is suspected. Suspected abuse within the context of a church day school or pre-school does fall within the description of the Florida Statute and a report is required.

Clearly, when child abuse is suspected or observed, the moral imperative, and potentially the legal requirement, is to call the Child Abuse Hotline 1-800-960-ABUSE (1-800-962-2873)

- A. Everyone in the church has a moral responsibility and a legal duty to report suspected abuse whenever it comes to their attention, regardless of where that abuse takes place. Reporting abuse is a form of ministering to the needs of those

crying out for help. Therefore, **immediately** notify the proper authorities (i.e., the local law enforcement agency in the jurisdiction in which the child/youth resides or in which the suspected abuse occurred and/or the appropriate department of children's services. Their number is **800-962-2873**). **This is a requirement of the Florida "MANDATED REPORTER" law.** Also paid staff over the ministry area should be immediately notified.

- B. Immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the accused, remove the accused from further involvement with children and/or youth. Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the safety of the child or youth is secured, the appointed clergy or other designated persons should inform the accused that abuse has been reported.
- C. If abuse is observed by, disclosed to, or suspected by a volunteer and/or paid staff member of the church, the observer shall report the incident immediately to the appointed clergy and supply pastors. If the appointed clergy and supply pastors is not available, the matter should be reported to the District Superintendent. If the accused is the appointed clergy and supply pastors or a member of her/his family, the allegations shall be immediately reported to the District Superintendent and immediately reported to the proper authorities as required by state or local law. 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 Lakeland.
- D. 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.
- E. 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.
- F. 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.
- G. After having reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the appointed clergy and supply pastors is 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.
- H. Keep a written report of the steps taken by the Church in response to the reported abuse. (See Appendix VII). 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.
- I. In order to safeguard privacy of all parties involved, there is to be no contact with the media. This will be handled by a **pre-determined** spokesperson selected by the appointed clergy and supply pastors. **NOTE:** The Conference Communications Department is a good source of help when media questions arise. The church spokesperson should generally convey a spirit of concern for the spiritual, physical,

and emotional wellbeing of all who are affected, and that the matter is being diligently and appropriately handled.

NOTE: The question that sometimes arises is: What about a “confidential communication” with a clergy person?

Florida law (FS90.505) provides that some specific communications may be considered confidential if they occurred in the context of “seeking spiritual counsel or advice” from a clergy person. Thus a clergy person may be confronted with the dilemma of discovering or suspecting abuse in the setting of a privileged conversation. While the church has historically placed a high value on clergy keeping such confidences, the 2008 *UM Discipline*, par. 341.5, provides an exception in cases of suspected child abuse or neglect.

Again, the moral imperative is to do that which will best protect children.

IX. Implementation

Unless otherwise specifically stated, it shall be the responsibility of Lakeside Fellowship UMC Leadership Teams or their designee to implement this Policy, to oversee the design of all Policy training materials, oversee all future Policy training events, and to ensure the ongoing effectiveness of this Policy.

X. Application

All of those who participate in the life of this congregation and use its facilities – individuals, organizations, and groups within and outside this congregation — are expected to respect, implement, and adhere to these provisions as a minimum.

Adoption

This Child and Youth Protection Policy is adopted by action of the _____ of the LakeSide Fellowship United Methodist Church this _____ day of _____, 20__.

Appointed clergy and supply pastors

Chair, Staff Parish Relations Committee

Chair, Leadership Team