

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, HARTSELLE, AL
CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION AND PROTECTION POLICY
(Revised November 2015)

PURPOSE: It is the purpose of First United Methodist Church of Hartselle, AL to provide a safe, secure environment for the children and students, who enter into our sanctuary, and to teach and care for them with the highest standards we can possibly provide.

GOAL: It is our goal to protect children and youth from harm of any form including sexual abuse, physical abuse, verbal abuse, mental abuse or molestation by church employees or volunteers. We also want to protect our employees and volunteers and the church from liability.

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION: We base our belief on the following scripture:

Matthew 19:14 Jesus said “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 18: 5-6 “Whoever receives one little child like this in my name receives Me. But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.”

It is our call to nurture and teach the child. As a church we are committed to protect and advocate for children, youth, and adults who are participating in our church programs.

SCREENING AND SELECTION OF WORKERS

Individuals considered for positions of leadership in the Children and Youth areas of ministry (with the exception of paid employees of the Church) must have attended First United Methodist Church for a minimum of six months before serving in such positions, or have a good reference from a church member that has known them for at least six months.

Every volunteer worker shall complete the Volunteer Application Form for Children and Youth. The Volunteer Screening Team will be responsible for checking references and ensuring that the forms are completed and kept on file for three years. The Volunteer Screening Team will consist of the Children’s Minister, the Youth Minister, the Children’s Choir Director, and the Senior Pastor, the chairperson of the Education/Discipleship Committee, Youth coordinator(s), and Children’s coordinator(s).

Volunteers as well as paid workers must provide written authorization to church personnel for purposes of a background check. This check must include national and multi-jurisdictional criminal check, State of Alabama check, sex offender registry check and must be renewed every three years. This check will be mandatory for all staff, volunteers, teachers, or sponsors. The applicants will need to provide three non-related references. At least two of these references must be checked by a member of the Screening Team.

Every volunteer and staff member must attend a safe sanctuaries training every year, and will be required to sign and abide by the participation covenant at the end of this document.

GUIDELINES FOR MINISTRY OF CHILDREN'S AND YOUTH PROGRAMS

All volunteers with children and youth must be at least 19 years old and 5 years older than the oldest member of the group for which they are responsible. Student helpers must be at least 12 years old, but must also abide by the 5 years older rule. Student helpers do not qualify as adults to satisfy the Two Adult Rule (see below).

The Two Adult Rule requires that two non-related* adults must be present at all times during any church-sponsored events involving children or youth except in emergency situations and where not reasonably feasible. Nursery, Sunday school class, and Bible study group for children or youth will be staffed with at least two non-related adults or the presence of a floater.

*For the purpose of this document the term “non-related” specifically means married, however close relationship (i.e. brother, sister, parent) is not ideal but may be acceptable in certain circumstances.

- **All workers should do everything possible to avoid any situation that would leave them alone with children or alone in a one-on-one situation.**
- **Adult leaders are expected to model Christian behavior.**
- **Adult leaders will not use bad or abusive language.**
- **Actions by adult leaders will be safe, gentle, non-threatening and comfortable for the children or youth.**
- **Topical discussion should be age-appropriate.**
- **Adult leaders will respect the privacy of children and youth. The reverse should also be true.**
- **During events when youth use host homes for overnight lodging and showers, no less than 3 students will be placed in such a situation.**
- **At all time a minimum of 1:7 ratio of adults to students shall be observed.**

Inappropriate touching by a worker or volunteer should not take place at anytime. It is always wise to ask before hugging a child. This gives the child permission to refuse. Touching need not be completely avoided, but staff and ministry workers must be aware of how it appears and how the person or child being touched may interpret the contact.

If a teacher must assist a child in the restroom, the door to the restroom shall remain unlocked, or partially open, so as to allow access by another adult, if necessary.

NURSERY AND TODDLER PROCEDURES

A parent or guardian should sign a register when delivering a baby or toddler to the nursery. The parent or guardian should not enter the nursery unless approved by the nursery staff who supervises the visit of the parent/guardian. Children in Church classes of infant through toddler will only be released to a properly identified and authorized adult. (Parents will sign a form each year stating who is authorized to pick up their child and who cannot.) Two adult ministry workers should be in the room at drop-off and pick-up times. If one of the ministry workers has not arrived, a parent must be asked to stay in the room until the second ministry worker arrives.) Parents of pre-school age children are encouraged to change the diapers of their own children before leaving them in the nursery. Parents should change diapers of their own children before leaving them in the nursery. Nursery workers should change diapers in plain view of other workers or adults.

PARENTAL SUPERVISION AND PARTICIPATION

Parents should not leave their children unattended prior to or after events scheduled with children or youth. Parents are encouraged to attend, and observe all activities in which their children are participating. If they plan to be used as a volunteer, they need to fill out the appropriate forms.

DRIVING RULES- GUIDELINES FOR DRIVERS

Only leaders or other qualified, screened individuals may drive for youth or children's activities or trips. When several vehicles are taken for an event, keeping the other vehicle in sight is an acceptable response for the two-adult rule. For activities where children/youth are transported to and from school and homes (i.e. carpooling), a single adult driver is acceptable provided the parents of the children have been notified of the name of the driver prior to the activity. In as much as possible, the children shall be seated in the back of the vehicle and not adjacent to the driver. The Church recognized that the facilitation of carpooling to special events, practices, etc. is beneficial to congregants and the Church's ministries. This policy is a set of best practices that will be followed where practicable.

All individuals who serve as an approved driver for children or youth must provide documentation or proof of the following:

- **Being 25 years or older, currently licensed to operate an automobile, and having been licensed to operate an automobile for at least five years.**
- **Having met the minimum state required liability insurance coverage**

- **Must be registered with and have completed safety training set forth by the First United Methodist Church's insurance company.**
- **A copy of driver's license and insurance card**
- **Having no serious conviction during the preceding three years on their driving record**
- **Must fill out a volunteer form**
- **A safe and reliable motor vehicle**
- **The ability to use child restraints when transporting any children (as required by law).**
- **The ability to obey all traffic laws**

Each occupant will be required to wear the seat belt provided and every reasonable effort will be made to insure that an adult driver is the provider of transportation for official church events departing from the church. Drivers must be given a copy of these Guidelines and sign acknowledgement that they have read it and will comply.

USE OF FLOATERS AND VOLUNTEERS

Floater are adults assigned to move in and out of rooms at random. They will be used throughout the building at all times when a church activity is going on. They may be used when necessary, but will not be the primary means of providing child safety. A youth worker or volunteer should be at least 5 years older than the youth or child they are leading. This is enforced for the protection of the youth and the worker. Each room designated for children and youth should have a door with a window that meets building codes as described by the City of Hartselle. Doors are not to be locked when Children or Youth are being supervised.

A basic rule for ministry with children and youth is to always give the parents advance notice and full information regarding the event in which their children will be participating.

APPROPRIATE EQUIPMENT AND SUPERVISION

It is very important for those planning ministries with children and youth to take all settings into account when planning for an outing or event. Each event should be planned with the lowest probability of an incident occurring. Workers should be aware of how to operate special equipment and should check out all equipment for safety. Outdoor ministries would involve the need for specialized knowledge. First aid skills are required when the ministry involves outdoor or away from civilization events such as camping or mission trips.

OVERNIGHT AND DAY TRIP RULES

Written permission and Medical Consent forms must be completed prior to any trip. A copy of each must be left on record in the church office, along with a list of those

participating. The “Two-Adult” leadership requirement must be followed throughout the trip as far as possible. The total number of adults on each trip will depend on the event and the number of children or youth attending. Appropriate separation of sexes and other precautions should be taken. All adult chaperones must have completed the approved volunteer forms. Sleeping arrangements will not have one adult and one child being in a room alone. No adult may share a bed with their child. All participants will be required to furnish a written consent and release form properly executed by a parent or guardian in order to participate. Speakers and or visiting volunteers who participate in overnight activities must provide a reference from a minister or appropriate authority from his or her home congregation.

REPORTING AND INVESTIGATIONS

Any volunteer or staff member who has knowledge or suspicion of abuse or neglect should immediately report the incident to their immediate supervisor. An “incident of abuse” is defined as any non-accidental injury or pattern of injuries to any person. It may be physical, sexual, and/or neglect. If an incident of abuse occurs or is suspected, the volunteer or staff member should report it to their immediate supervisor. If the person suspected is the Senior Pastor, then the report should be given to the Chairperson of the Staff Parish Relations Committee. The Senior Pastor or appropriate person shall notify the caretakers of the victim, and take any necessary steps to assure the child’s safety until the caretakers arrive. The safety of the victim is the Church’s primary concern. The Senior Pastor shall not confront the accused abuser with anger and hostility. The accused will be treated with dignity, but will immediately be removed from further involvement with children or youth. The Senior Pastor will notify the proper law enforcement or child protection services agency. The report may be oral, by telephone, or person to person. This must be immediately followed by a written report to the Department of Human Resources. All information should be kept strictly confidential. The accused should not be present during the reporting procedure. The Senior Pastor shall notify the District Superintendent, the Church’s insurance agency and general liability insurance carrier, and the church’s attorney. The Senior Pastor will keep a written record of the steps taken in the proceedings. A report detailing the event should be completed. The Senior Pastor or designee will make any necessary statements or responses to the news media. All parties involved should be prepared to cooperate fully with the investigation conducted by law enforcement officials or child protective services. The Senior Pastor, with the advice of counsel, may prepare a public statement to inform the congregation. Privacy and confidentiality of those involved must be strictly maintained. The Church will preserve the safety of the children and surround them with loving care and establish them in faith.

If the church staff or children or youth volunteers suspect that a child has been abused outside the care of the church, then the Pastor should be notified and the appropriate measures should be followed by the Pastor per the Department of Human Resources.

PARTICIPATION COVENANT STATEMENT

The Congregation of First United Methodist Church of Hartselle, Alabama is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, and volunteers who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the church. The following policy statement reflects our congregation's commitment to preserving this church as a holy place of safety and protection for all who would enter and as a place in which all people can experience the love of God through relationships with others.

1. No adult who has been convicted of child abuse (either sexual abuse, physical abuse, or emotional abuse) should volunteer to work with children or youth in any church-sponsored activity
2. Adult survivors of child abuse need the love and support of our congregation. Any adult survivor who desires to volunteer in some capacity to work with children or youth is encouraged to discuss his/her willingness with one of our church's ministers before accepting an assignment.
3. All adult volunteers involved with children or youth of our church must have been attending the church for at least six months.
4. The "Two-Adult Rule" shall be observed at all times, with the exception of carpooling as identified in the Driving Rules and Guidelines
5. Adult workers and volunteers shall attend yearly training and educational events provided by the church to keep them informed of church policies and state laws regarding child abuse.
6. Adult volunteers or workers shall immediately report to their supervisor any behavior that seems abusive or inappropriate.

PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS

1. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to observe and abide by all church policies regarding working in ministries with children youth?
2. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to participate in training and education events provided by the church related to your volunteer assignment?
3. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to promptly report abusive or inappropriate behavior to your supervisor?
4. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to inform a minister of this congregation if you have ever been convicted of child abuse?

I have read this PARTICIPATION COVENANT and I agree to observe and abide by the policies set forth above.

Signature of Applicant _____ Date _____

Print Full Name _____