

ATHENS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY

INTRODUCTION

The General Conference of the United Methodist Church adopted a resolution in April 1996 aimed at reducing the risk of child abuse in the church. The adopted resolution calls for all churches to welcome the children and also to make our churches safe places for children to grow and learn. It is our responsibility to be proactive in our recruiting and training to find people with a gift for caring for children and also to protect those volunteers from false accusations. It is also our responsibility to oversee all programs involving children to make sure there is a safe environment and to have a plan of response in place should an accusation arise. The General Conference resolution affirmed that every local church shall have a policy in place for protecting children.

PURPOSE

Athens United Methodist Church's purpose for establishing this Child Abuse Prevention Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all of our children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

STATEMENT OF COVENANT

As a Christian community of faith committed to ministry to and with children, we pledge to conduct all our activities and ministries in such a way that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all children and youth entrusted to us. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers and we will be responsible in overseeing our programs and events and in training our paid and volunteer staff that work with our children and vulnerable adults, so that they are able and equipped to minister to children and vulnerable adults in Jesus' name. We will report and respond to all suspected incidents of abuse as is required by state law and our moral conscience and we will be prepared to minister to the families of both the abused and the perpetrator.

BASIC OPERATING PROCEDURES

We adopt these standards for our ministries with children, youth, and vulnerable adults:

1. Recruiting--Screening--Hiring Practices
 - a. All workers with children and youth will have completed a written application form listing standard contact information and their gifts for that ministry
 - b. All workers will fill out a Personal Reference Form with 3 unrelated references and told that the references will be contacted.
 - c. All workers will be informed that a Driver's License check may be done if they are transporting children or youth.

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- d. The pastor, education chair, SPRC chairperson, or appropriate program director will conduct personal face-to-face interviews, before they begin their position.
- e. All workers will complete the Six Month Hospitality Rule, where they demonstrate an active relationship before they are allowed to supervise children.
- f. All workers must agree to the Athens UMC Participation Covenant .
- g. All workers will complete a Trak-1 Clearance for Criminal Background Check & Child Abuse History Clearance and Safe Sanctuaries training. These will need to be renewed every 3 years. Local, state and national Megan's Law websites will be checked.

2. Supervision

- a. Two UNRELATED Adult Rule – There will be two (2) Un-related Adults for each church activity involving children, youth, and vulnerable adults. If it is not possible to have two (2) UNRELATED Adults, there will be a Hall Roving/Roaming Adult who moves amid the church activities during the program with unscheduled appearances into the activity on a random basis.
- b. No Worker Under The Age of Eighteen (18) - no person under 18 years old shall be considered as one of the two (2) adults.
- c. Windows in all classroom doors will be required to allow anyone outside the room to look into the room to view activities in the classroom. If the door does not have a window, it shall be left open at all times.
- d. Five-Years-Older Rule – No person shall supervise children or youth unless he/she is at least 5 years older than the oldest student.
- e. Open Door Counseling – any counseling done will occur with the door open when possible. Privacy and confidentiality must be guaranteed.
- f. First Aid/CPR Training – When supervising children and youth one of the workers should be trained in First Aid and have CPR Training. It is suggested that more than one worker be trained so that back-ups are always available during any activity.
- g. Orientation for Workers – Mandatory training shall occur every 3 years and teachers and workers shall be trained to recognize the signs of abuse.
- h. Advance Notice to Parents – All activities must be planned well enough in advance so that parents can be given appropriate notice of the activity.
- i. Registration materials for activities in which children are outside direct supervision of their parents/guardians shall require signed written parental permission forms that include pertinent health information in order to participate.

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- j. All Participants and Leaders shall sign a covenant of participation listing rules for all trips, overnights, etc.
 - k. All parents and relevant family members will be trained in this Safe Sanctuary Program at least once a year.
 - l. Appropriate Equipment and Education – all equipment will be inspected with the safety of children kept in mind. All workers, staff and leaders will be trained in the safe use of all equipment as needed.
 - m. All staff, workers and leaders will maintain an “appropriate use” of any social networking websites that they use including MySpace, Facebook, etc.
3. Reporting
- a. LISTEN INTENTLY TO OUR CHILDREN AND YOUTH AND REPORT ANY POTENTIAL INCIDENT OF ABUSE.
 - b. Notify the parents of the victim and take any necessary steps to assure child’s safety. **Child’s safety is the first concern.**
 - c. Upon receiving information of abuse, the teacher or adult leader will report the incident immediately to the pastor, or education chairperson, or Adult leader. As a mandated reporter, the Pastor will call Childline & Abuse Registry at 1-800-932-0313 or proper law enforcement/child protective services.
 - d. If the abuse happened on church property by church volunteers or staff, they shall immediately be removed from contact with children until the incident report had been resolved. This should be handled in a discreet manner and they shall not be banned from other church ministries.
 - e. Treat abuser with dignity, but immediately remove him/her from further involvement with children and/or youth.
 - f. Notify the Pastor or annual conference authorities.
4. Responding
- a. A quick, compassionate and unified response to an alleged incident of child abuse will be initiated and documented.
 - b. The pastor shall be the only person authorized to make statements to representatives of the media. The pastor should check with the Conference Communicator or District Superintendent to review any statements before they are shared with the media.
 - c. If the allegation is against a staff person or the pastor, the Chair of Staff Parish Relations Committee will contact District Superintendent immediately.
 - d. Be prepared to cooperate fully with the investigation.

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- e. Pastoral support will be available to all persons involved in the incident as indicated.

5. Cyber-Safety

- a. Have parental permission information for children, youth, and vulnerable adults in writing for:
 - 1. Posting photos on any websites or sending e-mail or text messages or making videos
 - 2. E-mailing, Instant Messaging (IM'ing), calling, texting or sending data to a child, youth, or vulnerable adult by computer, PDA, or cell phone
 - 3. The sharing of any full name or contact information.
- b. Never post easily identifiable information online.
 - 1. Use "Bcc" options in sending mass e-mails.
 - 2. Be cautious when transmitting easily identifiable information.
 - 3. Limit what is communicated in electronic prayer requests.
- c. Limit individual communication with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.
 - 1. Conduct any communications in a professional manner.
 - 2. Save all communications you have with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. (An electronic "paper trail" can be important.)
 - 3. If you are uneasy about any topic addressed in an e-mail or an e-mail in general, send a blind carbon copy to a parent/guardian (if appropriate) or another trusted adult. Honor privacy, but not secrecy.
 - 4. If abuse is divulged electronically, follow standard reporting procedures.
- d. Safety Measures for sharing photos electronically
 - 1. When posting photos, refrain from using names and never use last names or identifiable information.
 - 2. Check photos for vulnerable/compromising situations and to make sure they uphold your mission. Check to make sure nametags are not distinguishable.
 - 3. Use low-resolution photos whenever possible and slightly blur/pixilate photos.
 - 4. Obtain additional permission to use photos elsewhere (i.e. a journal or website, newsletter, local paper, etc.)
 - 5. Consider or prefer using stock or purchased photo's.

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