

Safe Church Policy

Marysville United Methodist Church

And

A Stable Beginning Preschool

Scripture and our United Methodist tradition inform us in our belief that all of human life is of sacred worth, perhaps children most of all. Hear the words of Jesus in Matthew 18:5-6: "Whoever welcomes [a] child, welcomes me. 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."

With The Book of Discipline we affirm that our youth and our children are full human beings in their own right but, because they are particularly vulnerable, they are our sacred trust to whom we have special responsibility (Paragraph 162.III.C.). The Church is particularly accountable to provide a safe environment for youth/children (Paragraph 161.II.H.). "Children must be protected from economic, physical, emotional, and sexual exploitation and abuse" of any kind (Paragraph 162.III.C.).

Therefore, as a covenanted Christian community of faith, it is the purpose of Marysville United Methodist Church to conduct all youth/children related events in ways that promote the safety and spiritual growth of all of our youth/children, as well as all of the workers with youth/children who also participate in these events.

SCOPE:

This policy and its provisions shall apply to all paid and unpaid staff, whether lay or clergy who have any contact with youth/children who participate in any church activities or events. For the purposes of this document, children are infants through fifth grade, youth includes junior high, which are grades sixth through ninth and senior high which are grades ninth through twelfth. During the summer the grade level of the child is defined as the grade that they will be entering in the fall.

PURPOSE:

Our congregation's purpose for establishing this Youth/Children's Safe-Church Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all of our children, and youth.

STATEMENT OF COVENANT:

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all of our youth/children, as well as the workers with them. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; we will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events; we will educate all of our workers with children, and youth regarding the use of all appropriate policies and methods (including first aid and methods of discipline); we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law; and we will be prepared to respond to media inquiries if an incident occurs.

Procedure for Updating and Revising the Youth and Children Safe-Church Policy

1. **Updating/Revising:**
The Safe Church Committee of Marysville United Methodist Church shall have the authority to revise and update these policies with Administrative Councils approval on an annual basis or at the request of any staff member or the Policy Coordinator.
2. **Waiver of Policies:**
Church policies may be waived occasionally for exceptional circumstances. The goal of Marysville United Methodist Church is to promote safety while maintaining practical flexibility in children and youth ministry. Waiving policies will only be authorized by the parent, Policy Coordinator and/or in consultation with the program staff person in charge.
3. **Modification of Policies:**
This policy may be modified or withdrawn by Marysville United Methodist Church Safe Church Committee at any time with Administrative council's approval. These policies are not intended to create an implied or express contract with any person. They are not intended to create a legally enforceable or binding promise or representation.

YOUTH AND CHILDREN ACTIVITY GUIDELINES

Discipline & Behavior for A Stable Beginning Preschool:

1. We use positive reinforcement whenever possible, praising constructive and appropriate behaviors. In most cases inappropriate behavior can easily be re-directed. When children do continue to have difficulty with self-control, we will first talk with the child, explaining why their behavior is not acceptable, and offer the child alternative ways to behave. If difficulty with self-control continues, the child will be given a short "quiet time", which means being removed from the group for a few minutes. If the child still cannot learn to handle the situation, teachers and/or the Director will request a conference to enlist the parents' help in redirecting the child's behavior. Only in the most extreme cases where a child's behavior is detrimental to the group/class will s/he be dismissed from school.

Disciple Policy for Sunday School:

1. If a volunteer has a conflict with a child it will be brought to the parents' attention. If the conflict continues, the parents will be asked to stay in the class with the child until the problem is resolved.

General Safety Requirements:

1. Parents shall be given advance notice and full information regarding any church-related activities or meetings for their youth/children.
2. MUMC must be insured for abuse, risk, and facility hazards.

3. Any activity that has a risk factor to it requires the presence of an experienced and/or certified guide or instructor. For example, swimming, river rafting, rock climbing, challenge course, or other risk-related activities. Participation in these activities shall also be properly insured with a certificate of liability. If the activity is contracted to an outside party, then the contractor shall also be properly insured with a certificate of liability insurance providing a minimum of one million dollars liability coverage limits.
4. If any special equipment is used that requires special instruction the instructions for its use will be posted and followed. Participants will also be instructed verbally in the use of the equipment.
5. Parental consent forms that included permission for medical care & emergency contact information are required from all youth/children participating in church events. These forms shall accompany the adult coordinator of the event or meeting and shall include a waiver of liability. In the case of an accident that requires medical attention, the person who is responsible for the event or the meeting will use all means possible to contact the parent, guardian or emergency contact while ensuring that the youth/children receive the proper care.
6. There shall be a first aid kit on the premises at all church events and accompanying a qualified adult on all overnight events. The first aid kit shall meet basic first response items. Currently we have first aid kits in the kitchen, nursery, narthex (by the Friendship booth) and one in the office.
7. Any overnight event shall have, at the least, one staff certified in first aid, or equally qualified, and CPR who can administer minor first aid, and who are capable of determining whether additional medical attention is necessary. This person is also responsible for reporting all incidences to the Policy Coordinator or pastor.
8. For all overnight events that primarily target minors, all medicine including supplements, will be given to the designated first aid staff at the beginning of the event, and it will then be distributed as appropriate by first aid staff. An on-going log of all medications handed out and treatments administered will also be kept.
9. All participants in an event will consistently remain in groups of three or more, unless in a public place. All minors will have an adult leader present.
10. If anyone notices unrecognized people at an event, the event or meeting coordinator shall be informed as soon as possible. Visitor will be contacted and identified and/or asked to leave as appropriate

Driving Regulations:

1. Only those who are 18 or older may drive on event business or during an event. If there are passengers involved, the driver shall be at least 23.
2. The driver shall possess a valid driver's license, appropriate insurance and the driver's record shall conform to any standards that are required by the church's insurance company.
3. If an adult other than a parent or guardian provides rides to or from a church event or meeting for youth/children, the parent or guardian must provide written permission to the event coordinator and copies given to the chaperone that is driving.
4. Youth are discouraged from driving themselves to overnight events. If, due to extenuating circumstances, a youth needs to drive to an overnight event, keys for the automobile will be held by the event leader during the overnight event.
5. If a youth drives to an event or meeting, the youth who is driving shall carry written permission to drive to the event from his/her parents.
6. There shall be no "in and out" privileges for youth/children. Exceptions to this rule shall be approved in advance by the event leader.
7. Vehicles that are used for and during events shall meet all legal requirements.

Overnight Events:

1. Boys and girls may not sleep in the same room unless there is no other option as a result of shortages of chaperones or because of the nature of the space. If they are in the same room and there is a divider available, it shall be used to separate the genders. If there is no divider available, boys and girls shall be at least six feet apart from each other. Adults will not share a bed or bedding with youth and must have no physical contact with youth while sleeping.
2. There shall be at least one adult of the same gender in the sleeping quarters; two adults are required for each gender if less than three youth/children are present.
3. At overnight events the opportunity for an adequate amount of sleep will be provided.

Policy Coordinator:

1. The Policy Coordinator is responsible for developing, overseeing and reviewing the training of all staff and volunteers. This training may include the following subject areas:
 - Appropriate boundary guidelines
 - Types of abuse, the relationship between imbalances of power and abuse
 - Causes and indicators of abuse
 - Reporting procedures
 - What to do when you suspect or discover child abuse
 - Understanding the victim and the abuser
 - Staff and volunteer role in working with abuse victims
 - Conference youth/children event policies
 - Media reporting policies
 - Organize and schedule the Safe Church Committee with the Youth & Children's directors. The Safe Church Committee should meet at least annually for review of Safe Church Policy.
2. The Policy Coordinator shall be required to be a Conference Designated Safety Officer (DSO) and trained accordingly.
3. The Policy Coordinator is also responsible for serving as the resource person on these issues:
 - For receiving reports of guideline misuse
 - For reports of abuse
 - Informing all persons including CPS and law enforcement when there has been an allegation of abuses.
4. The Policy Coordinator is responsible for carefully documenting all aspects of an abuse incident on the Abuse Incident Report Form. The policy coordinator is in no way to investigate an allegation of abuse, but to report to CPS and/or law enforcement This report shall be forwarded immediately to the pastor, District Superintendent, and Conference Office, once cleared by CPS and/or law enforcement.
5. If a child/ youth reports that they have been abused in another setting, the Policy Coordinator shall notify CPS, and/or law enforcement. In the case of a minor if the parents are not the subject of the abuse, they need to be informed as well after consultation with CPS and/or law enforcement in which they agree that it is appropriate to contact parents.
6. The spokesperson will be designated previously and will have a prepared statement or written notes and not speak extemporaneously. The spokesperson will never make any statement indicating that the church does not take the allegation seriously or in any way blame the victim.

7. The Policy Coordinator will coordinate outside help such as, advocates and therapists to be made available to the congregation as needed after an allegation.

Safe Church Committee:

1. The safe Church Committee shall be made up of the Children's Director, Youth Director, The Preschool Director, Policy Coordinator, back-up Policy Coordinator, any DSO (Designated Safety Officers), COE chairperson, 2 youth, and a minimum of 10 members of the congregation.
2. The Safe Church Committee shall meet at least once a year prior to Rally Sunday to review the Safe Church Policies and see that we are adhering to all safety issues and to suggest new policies.
3. They shall also meet if a safety situation arises that necessitates a review of the Safe Church Policy.
4. The Safe Church Committee members are encouraged to take the conference training (to become DSO's) but at the very least they will receive training from MUMC's Policy Coordinator.

Policy for Screening Paid and Volunteer Staff:

1. Marysville United Methodist Church shall have the designated staff person, whose job it is to see that State Patrol background clearances are made for all volunteers. (Staff Parish Relations Committee is responsible for checking references and backgrounds for all paid staff.) This person will keep the background checks in a safe, locked space.
2. All preschool staff & volunteer background clearances will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the preschool office.
3. An adult who works in a role that places them in direct contact with youth/children shall complete a Washington State Patrol Criminal History Check. These documents need to be sent or called into the Conference Office.
4. Those who have not attended Marysville United Methodist church for 6 months shall complete an Application for Volunteer Form and provide three reference checks from a prior church, school or employer who are not related to the applicant and one reference from a Marysville United Methodist church member.
5. The staff member in charge of updating the background checks and references shall ensure that checks are completed and up to date every month for every (?)Adult who is involved in the program or will be involved.

6. A criminal conviction for a sexual offense disqualifies an applicant from working with youth/children. Other automatic disqualifiers are convictions for, assaults, murder, kidnapping, child pornography, domestic violence and physical abuse. Anyone who wants to work with youth/children should be willing to have a discussion with the pastor and/or the Policy Coordinator about their ability to work with children and youth and know what the boundaries are.

CODE OF BEHAVIOR

Definition of Abuse:

1. Physical Abuse:

This is abuse in which a person deliberately and intentionally causes bodily harm to a another person. Examples may include battery , burning, choking, fracturing bones, and other non-accidental injuries.

2. Emotional Abuse:

This is abuse in which a person exposes a youth or younger child to spoken and/or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty. Emotional abuse sends a message to the youth that he or she is worthless, bad, unloved, and undeserving of love and care. Examples of emotional abuse include being deprived of all parental affection, being locked in closets or other confining spaces, being incessantly told they are bad, or being forced to abuse alcohol or illegal drugs.

3. Neglect:

This is abuse in which a person endangers a youth's health, welfare, and safety through negligence. It may include withholding food, medical care, affection Neglect may well be the most common form of abuse. Reports of neglect from teenagers should not be ignored.

4. Child Sexual Abuse:

This type of abuse is defined as any sexual activity with a child when consent is not or cannot be given; it includes sexual penetration, sexual touching, exposure, and voyeurism (Berliner, 2000, Finkelhor, 1979). The youth victim is not capable of consenting to such contact or resisting such sexual act. Examples of sexual abuse include fondling, intercourse, incest, and exposure to pornography and or prostitution.

5. Ritual Abuse:

This is abuse in which physical, sexual, or psychological violence is inflicted on a youth, intentionally and in a stylized way, by someone (or multiple people) with responsibility for the victim's welfare. Typically, the perpetrator appeals to some higher authority or power to justify his or her abuses. Examples of ritual abuse may include cruel treatment of animals or repetitious threats of sexual or physical violence to the youth victim or to people related to the youth victim. Any youth making such a report must not be ignored.

Rules of General Supervision for Adults Working with Youth and Children:

1. The behavior of adults working with youth/children must reflect the highest standards of Christian maturity; foster trust at all times, and is above reproach. Adults engaged in church-related events or activities with youth/children present should never engage in sexually suggestive behavior or inappropriate touching.
2. Any sexual or sexually suggestive behavior by an adult toward any fellow worker or event participant at a church event where an imbalance of power exists between the acting adult and the other person constitutes an abuse of power. Consent is not a defense to an abuse of power.
3. Sexual harassment is any unwanted sexual advance, physical or verbal demand, or sexually suggestive behavior which is perceived as demeaning, intimidating or coercive. Prohibited behavior includes unsolicited and unwelcome contact that has sexual or coercive overtones, including:
 - Sexually suggestive or coercive communication of any kind such as obscene letters, notes or invitations, comments, threats, slurs, epithets, jokes about gender-specific traits or sexual orientation, sexual propositions.
 - Any bullying or intimidation act whether it is physical contact, such as intentional touching, pinching, brushing against another's body, impeding or blocking movement, assault, coercing sexual intercourse; visual contact, such as leering or staring at another's body, sexually suggestive gesturing, displaying sexually suggestive objects or pictures, cartoons, posters, or magazines; or verbal threats, name-calling, or any unwanted gesture.
4. The following guidelines for touching are to be carefully followed by anyone working with youth/children:
 - Touching should always be initiated by the youth/child. The adult should respond to the child's need for comfort and encouragement and not base touching on their own emotional needs. Appropriate touching by an adult involves holding hands as part of a group activity; touching only the head or shoulders, and/or a side-on hug of the shoulders.
 - Touching between an adult and a youth/child shall only occur in the presence of other adults.
 - A youth's or child's preference not to be touched should be respected by adults and others. This includes youth to youth and child to child.
5. Anytime an adult thinks that their own or another adult's behavior towards a youth/child, either touching or verbal, may have been perceived as inappropriate, that adult shall report the behavior to the leader in charge or the Policy Supervisor.

6. All adults shall avoid being alone, **one-on-one**, with youth/children unless parental permission has been given in writing previously. Interaction with youth/children shall be conducted within the sight/supervision of at least one other adult. In cases where it is impossible to avoid direct, **one-on-one** interactions, the following guidelines shall be observed:
 - If an adult or leader is alone with youth/children, two or more youth/children shall be present with the adult or leader.
 - If interactions are being conducted in a classroom (one-on-one) and there is only one adult available, there shall be a roamer on premises and the classroom door shall remain open.
 - When private consultation is needed between a youth/child and an adult, another adult shall be informed of the activity and of the location in which the activity is taking place. The monitoring adult shall strive to ensure that the consultation takes place in a public space within sight of others but not necessarily within hearing range.
7. Adults shall respect the privacy of youth/children when changing clothing or showering to the extent safety allows. Adults will not be nude in front of children/youth. Adults will not intentionally expose genitalia to children.
8. Youth/children shall be supervised at all times by at least one adult who is at least four years older than the oldest youth/child who is attending the event as a participant.
9. When two adults are required for supervision, the second adult should not be related or involved in an intimate relationship, i.e., a spouse, parent, sibling, child to the first adult, or a boyfriend/girlfriend relationship.

The ratios are as follows:

- Infants under 1 year 2 adults (or 1 adult & 1 youth helper) for more than 1 infant
- Toddlers 1-2 years 1 adult to 6 kids
- Preschool – 5th 1 adult to 12 kids
- 6th – 9th grade 1 adult to 14 kids
- 10th – 12th grade 1 adult to 16 kids

10. At least 50% of adults at an event where junior high are present shall be at least 21 or older.
11. Anyone not registered for an event or activity is required to check in and out with the event director.

12. There will be absolutely no drinking of alcohol or use of illegal drugs at or during any church-related activities or events. Any drinking of alcohol or use of illicit or illegal drugs will lead to immediate suspension and removal from the event.
13. Possession of firearms is forbidden.
14. Possession of pornography is prohibited.
15. All adults working with youth/children shall abide by all laws and regulations applicable to the location of the event.

Rules for the Youth and child:

1. Prior to any overnight or longer activity or event, youth/children shall be required to sign and abide by a covenant defining appropriate behavior.

RESPONSES TO INCIDENCES AT AN ACTIVITY OR EVENT

Accidents when parents are not immediately available:

1. The person who witnesses the accident shall immediately act to ensure the safety and care of those involved. Then share this information with the first aid staff or leader at the event or activity. The first aid staff shall in turn fill out the Accident Report Form, report the incident to the key leaders of the event, and notify the parents of the incident in conjunction with first aid staff or leader.
2. The first aid staff and/or the event coordinator/leader is responsible for carefully documenting all aspects of the incident using the Accident Report Form and a copy of this report shall be kept on file.
3. The event coordinator/leader shall make contacts as needed with the Conference insurance company, the pastor of the church. This coordinator shall also determine whether there is need for an investigation or additional follow-up.

Allegations of Abuse:

1. All reports of abuse shall be treated with confidentiality, except to report to CPS and/or law enforcement.
2. The highest priority shall be placed on securing the safety of the victim. In no case shall the accused be confronted until the safety of the victim is secured and doing so has been cleared by CPS and/or law enforcement.
3. Keep a written record of all steps taken by the church in response to the allegations of the abuse.

4. The person who receives the report of abuse shall **immediately** share this information with:
 - The event coordinator/leader unless the person suspected of abuse is the event leader.
 - Policy Coordinator/media spokesperson
 - Pastor
 - Child Protective Service/law enforcement
 - Parents
 - District Superintendent
 - Conference Office
 - Insurance Agent
 - Church Attorney
5. The Policy Coordinator is responsible for carefully documenting all aspects of the incident using the Abuse Incident Report Form. The Policy Coordinator will not attempt to interview either the alleged victim or alleged offender. This report will be forwarded immediately to the pastor.
6. The person who first hears the allegation of abuse, in partnership with the Policy Coordinator, is responsible for reporting to the Child Protective Services or to the appropriate law enforcement agency.
7. The Policy Coordinator will notify the parents when and if it is clear that it is safe to do so per CPS and/or law enforcement.
8. Any volunteer or hired staff person accused of abuse shall be immediately relieved of duties related to this or any other church event involving youth or children and be isolated from further contact with participants, guests and others who may be negatively impacted by the individual's presence until the review process is completed. The individual accused of abuse may not return to these types of duties until the Policy Coordinator has completed a review. This applies whether or not the alleged act of abuse occurred during a church-related event.
9. Whether or not the alleged act occurred during a church-related event, the leader and Policy Coordinator shall jointly review the incident to determine whether any additional actions are required. They shall also report the incident to appropriate parties (i.e., civil authorities, the Conference insurance company, etc.).
10. If the incident is put under investigation by appropriate civil authorities, the investigation will be monitored by the Policy Coordinator and church officials until there is an outcome. All investigating will be the responsibility of civil authorities.

11. If there is no civil investigation or once the investigation by civil authorities is completed, the Policy Coordinator and/or leaders shall jointly review the incident to determine whether any further actions are needed.
12. The Policy Coordinator is responsible for contacting the accused and informing the accused of the nature of the process, only after cleared to do so by CPS/ law enforcement. The purpose of this meeting is not to interrogate the accused but to discuss the accusation. During meetings with the accused, one other mutually agreed-upon witness shall be present (e.g., a local pastor, district superintendent, the other coordinator, etc.).
13. After conducting a thorough review, the Policy Coordinator shall report the findings to the accused, once cleared by CPS and/or law enforcement. If it is determined that the person has committed an act of abuse they will establish a covenant with the offender that regulates his or her behavior at all levels of involvement with the church. This covenant shall include both an agreed-upon record of what offending actions were committed and agreed-upon that they will no longer be allowed to participate in youth or children's ministry's, activities, or events in the future.
14. All documentation relating to the incident shall be confidentially filed in the Policy Coordinator's locked files.
15. A list shall be maintained in conjunction with the State Patrol forms at the church and Conference office of those who may not participate in related events involving youth/children. The purpose of this list is to screen those who are requesting to work with youth/children. The church or Conference is not under obligation to report the reason for placement on the list with anyone other than the accused.