

# **Children and Youth Protection and Safety Policy**

**“Safe Sanctuaries”**  
Creating a safe place  
and reducing the risk of child abuse in the church.



## **John Wesley United Methodist Church**

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# Children and Youth Protection and Safety Policy

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## THE NURTURE AND CARE OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

For the purposes of this policy, children and/or youth are defined as anyone under 18 years of age. The terms *children* and *youth* may be used interchangeably for the purposes of this document.

Jesus said "Let the children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs." (Luke 18:16) He also said "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me." (Matthew 18:5)

Those who entrust their children and youth to the care of the church have a right to expect that due attention has been given to the recruiting, hiring, training, and supervision of persons in charge of church programs for children and youth. As a Christian community, we believe that children and youth should be safe and well cared for, and we consider it to be our pastoral responsibility to strive to provide a loving, secure environment for children and youth in our congregation by being advocates for children and youth and establishing clearly-defined safeguards, procedures, and policies for children and youth pastoral care and protection.

Basic norms have therefore been developed for prevention of and response to child abuse. We are establishing a policy and program planning process that will:

- (1) Provide a place in which children and youth are loved and safe from all forms of abuse and neglect.
- (2) Provide paid and volunteer staff with clear and shared norms for appropriate behavior in regard to their ministries with children and youth.
- (3) Make prompt, competent, and pastoral response to allegations of child abuse.

Our policy making and planning processes include the clergy, lay leaders, and staff who have responsibility for ministry to children or youth.

The chair of the staff parish relations committee, in conjunction with the youth ministry board and youth director, plus the children's ministry board and children's ministry director, will oversee the implementation of this policy. The office manager will provide for the safekeeping of Appendix B and Appendix C at the church.

This policy will be reviewed at least annually by clergy, staff, lay leaders, and volunteers so that all will be reminded of the policy, and any needed modifications may be made to the policy.

John Wesley United Methodist Church will make sure to carry adequate insurance coverage for the scope of ministry offered to children and youth.

Procedures for reporting known or suspected child abuse are given in Section II

## Section I

### CHILDREN AND YOUTH PROTECTION

Children and youth protection encompasses several areas, including the following:

- (1) We want to be intentional about teaching and modeling appropriate parenting and adult/child interaction skills.
- (2) We desire to educate members/volunteers concerning the proper treatment of children and youth involved in congregational programs.
- (3) We want to provide appropriate channels for reporting alleged abuse.
- (4) We want to protect possible victims.

For the purposes of this document and under Ohio law, an abused child is defined as a person under the age of 18 who is the victim of sexual activity, who is endangered or neglected, or who suffers physical injury, mental injury, or death other than by accident. Child abuse may be physical, sexual, emotional, or mental, and may be the result of actions or a failure or refusal to act (e.g. lack of care for a child).

Our congregation's written policy on child and youth abuse prevention includes, but is not limited to, the following specific areas:

#### 1. Parenting Skills:

- When possible, we will provide classes for members of the church and community on sound parenting skills and child- and youth-abuse prevention.

#### 2. Training:

- Training on issues of child sexual abuse in church settings will be required for all clergy, paid staff, and volunteers who regularly work with children and youth (i.e., Rainbow friends teachers, youth group leaders, etc.).
- Training will include church policy on children and youth protection and safety, procedures to be used in ministry with children and youth, appropriate steps to report an incident of abuse, and details of state laws regarding child abuse.
- A copy of the current John Wesley child and youth protection policy will be given to all clergy, paid staff, and volunteers who regularly work with children and youth.
- Church-wide training will be offered at least annually.
- John Wesley's child protection policy will be posted on the Children's Ministry bulletin board next to the nursery in the preschool hallway.
- First Aid and CPR training will be offered for all workers with children and youth and will be encouraged for all volunteers (required of Youth Director). Staff and volunteers will be expected to use this training as needed. Parents will be notified.
- Training for individuals may be offered by a staff person on an as-needed basis.

#### 3. Communication/Supervision:

- It is important that all staff, paid and volunteer, be involved in regular, scheduled staff meetings to discuss prevention measures, policies, problems, and potential problems.
- Clarification of staff actions and plans of action should be open for discussion at any meeting.
- While convicted child abusers who are members of the congregation are to receive the normal pastoral care afforded any child of God, at no time is a known convicted child abuser to be assigned to ministries with children or youth.
- Parents shall be informed that this Children and Youth Protection policy exists and shall be invited to know its contents.
- Parents will be provided advance notice and full information about activities involving children and youth.

#### 4. Individual Counseling:

- One-on-one interactions between an adult and a child or youth are sometimes necessary and appropriate, but care must be taken that they be conducted in an environment that provides visibility to other adults.
- If at all possible, another adult is to have knowledge of staff members' whereabouts and with whom they are meeting.
- Youth receiving individual counseling should be told they are free to discuss any aspects of the counseling process with a parent or other adult, especially if they are uncomfortable about anything that occurs in counseling.

#### 5. Adult Presence (adult is defined as 18 years and older):

- All church-sponsored or community groups of children or youth who meet at the church will have two adult leaders in the building who are aware of the activity.
- When the group includes both boys and girls, and parents are not present, it is strongly recommended that both male and female adult leaders be present.
- For children and youth Sunday school, if it is not possible to have two adults in the classroom on Sunday morning, one staff person or adult volunteer will be available to walk the halls and periodically check in on classes.
- No workers under the age of 18 will have sole responsibility, nor be alone with any children.
- New volunteers or paid workers must be related (attending and known) to the congregation for at least 6 months before working with children and/or youth. In the case of teaching Sunday school, someone who has been related to the congregation for fewer than 6 months may teach with an adult co-worker in the classroom at all times.

#### 6. Touch:

- God embraces children and youth with love, placing their nurture and care in our hands. We remember that Jesus of Nazareth wrapped small children in the loving arms of his embrace.
- Christian community includes physical touching as an expression of affection and as a vessel for healing. We hold up common positive examples of touching such as the laying on of hands in healing and the holding of hands in prayer.
- We also recognize evil and understand that the human capacity for evil can corrupt even the holiest of gifts. Therefore, we restrict our touching and affection to those sacramental and public activities commonly held appropriate throughout the history and worship of the church.
- Child-initiated hugs may be returned by adult workers in an appropriate manner keeping in mind the policies of this Safe Sanctuaries document.
- With the exception of attending to infants' and toddlers' hygienic needs, touching children or youth on the genitals, allowing them to touch one another's genitals, or allowing children or youth to touch the genitals of an adult is always inappropriate in any church activity or setting.
- Likewise, violence to children and youth, physically to their bodies or spiritually to their hearts and minds, is never appropriate in a church activity or elsewhere.

#### 7. Overnight Trips and Field Trips:

- Situations in which paid or volunteer staff members are taking children or youth on field trips away from the church for long periods of time or for overnight outings are to be carefully planned by the staff.
- Individuals who are new to the organization are not left alone with the children or youth in a situation in which there is no other staff member to observe.
- In no circumstance is one adult (other than the parent) to take a child/youth or children on an overnight outing alone.
- In addition, when a group is going to an overnight that includes both boys and girls, and parents are not present, it is required that both male and female leaders be present.

8. Open Door Policy:

- Protection for children and youth requires that an open door policy be followed. The parents of the children served, the clergy, administrative staff and professional staff of the church have the right to visit and observe the children or youth activity, classroom, or church-sponsored program at any time, unannounced.
- Classrooms will have eye-level windows or doors will be kept open.

9. Discipline Policy:

- Children and youth are expected to show respect for adults and each other during all church activities.
- Children and youth will be treated with respect. They will not be spanked or disciplined in ways that deprive them of their basic right to be safe.
- Discipline is expected to be appropriate for the child or youth's age.
- Appropriate responses to inappropriate behavior include verbally reprimanding the child or youth, separating the child or youth from the group (time out), notifying parents of the problem, and/or taking a disruptive child or youth to a parent or a church staff member.

10. Driving Policy:

- The policy on driving stipulates criteria and restrictions that apply to drivers for church-sponsored activities. (See Appendix A, John Wesley UMC Driving Policy.)
- If a church-sponsored group leaves the premises, two or more leaders must be present and must include at least one male and female if the group is mixed gender.
- In every case, a written permission slip must be signed by a child's parent or guardian prior to departure. The youth groups (middle and senior high) use one permission slip for the church calendar year which covers all events on the Church Calendar.

11. Background Checks and Hiring Policies:

- Thorough background checks may be made of all paid staff and volunteers who have regular responsibility for children and/or youth, as well as all other church program employees, to the extent permitted by law, prior to employment to determine current or historic child abuse or sexual misconduct, criminal records, or pedophilic behavior.
- All persons, paid and volunteer, who work with children and/or youth shall sign a form consenting in advance to possible fingerprinting and background checks in the future (Appendix B, Self-Disclosure and Consent Form).
- All persons, paid and volunteer, who work with children and/or youth will be asked to fill out a personal information and self-disclosure questionnaire (Appendix B, Self-disclosure and Consent Form).
- Prior to hiring, paid staff will undergo a screening process that includes completing an application form, providing references that will be checked, and having one or more interviews by an interview team comprised of at least one member of the staff parish relations committee, a pastor, and one or more members of the ministry area lay leadership.
- In the case of clergy, this congregation will rely on thorough background checks made by the West Ohio Conference.
- No person who has had a child abuse conviction shall be permitted to work with children and/or youth.
- No person who refuses to sign the Self-disclosure and Consent Form shall be permitted to work with children and/or youth.
- All clergy, lay staff, and volunteers with children and youth shall sign the Policy Awareness Acknowledgment (Appendix C), signifying that they have read and understand the congregation's policy.

#### 11. Lifestyle Guidelines:

Because adults who work with children and/or youth exert significant influence over those in their care, the following lifestyle guidelines are lifted up:

- A commitment to Christ.
- A commitment to growing in Christ.
- A commitment to using resources in service to Christ and others.
- A commitment to attending church regularly.
- A commitment to the John Wesley UMC mission statement and vision.
- Refraining from the use of illegal alcohol, tobacco, and drugs.
- Abstaining from all use of alcohol and tobacco when in the presence of children and/or youth in the program.
- Steering clear of any activity that would or could put the adult in a position that might cause harm to others, the cause of Christ, or John Wesley UMC. Adults who work with children will
  - Refrain from romantic involvement with children and/or youth.
  - Take care to avoid leader/student situations that might be construed as something more than leader-to-student relationship.
  - Do nothing with children or youth that the adult is unsure the child's/youth's parents would approve of.
- Accountability with supervisors and other leaders.
- Living a life that is free of sexual immorality.
- Living a lifestyle in Christ that is above reproach.

## Section II

### CHILDREN AND YOUTH ABUSE REPORTING PROCEDURES

The purpose of child abuse reporting is to provide children, youth, and their families with an avenue to air their grievances, ensure that they will be heard, and provide that some action, when appropriate, will be taken on their behalf. The intent of this church's policy is to be firm and fair without fostering an unnecessary climate of fear or the erroneous presumption that a person is guilty until proven innocent.

Specific details of an alleged abuse incident must be documented in writing and retained. Such documentation of a complaint of abuse by someone connected with John Wesley UMC is to contain the following information:

- Name, age, and address of child or youth
- Name and address of the parent or guardian
- Name and address of the accused
- Reasons why you suspect the child is being abused or neglected
- Documentation of the steps taken by the church in response to the complaint
- Any other helpful information

If a complaint of child abuse is made, the following policies shall be followed. All complaints shall be investigated promptly.

1. Parents of the alleged victim will be notified promptly.
2. Steps will be taken to ensure the safety of the child and/or youth until parents arrive.
3. Known or reasonably suspected child abuse must be reported immediately to the senior pastor and lay staff of the church's children and/or youth program (whichever applies).
4. The Staff Parish Relations Committee shall be informed if the incident involves clergy or paid staff.
5. The accused will be treated with dignity but will be removed from further involvement with children and/or youth while an investigation is held.
6. A report must be made to the Hamilton County Police and the Hamilton County Department of Human Services, Children's Services, 241-KIDS (5437).
7. The report and pertinent information should be given to the congregational legal representation.
8. The Cincinnati District Office and West Ohio Conference shall be informed.
9. If the accused involved is clergy, a trained response team member shall be made available by the Bishop's office to assist congregations with investigations and pastoral care. This response team member shall determine the nature of the charge and whether suspension from work in the congregation is warranted during the investigation. The District and Conference shall be kept informed of the course of the investigation.
10. Pastoral resources shall be made available to the victim, the victim's family, the accused, the accused's family, and the congregation.
11. Prompt reports of any conviction of criminal charges shall be made to the sexual misconduct liability insurance protection carrier.
12. All actions regarding the complaint shall be documented and kept on file.
13. A designated spokesperson will be solely responsible for responding to any media interest.
14. A brief and honest statement to be made to the congregation without giving unnecessary details, placing blame, interfering with the victim's privacy, or violating confidentiality should be prepared.
15. Full cooperation will be given to law enforcement officials and child protective services.

## Appendix A

John Wesley United Methodist Church  
1927 West Kemper Road  
Cincinnati, Ohio 45249

### DRIVING POLICY

**Purpose:** To promote the safety of persons being transported by vehicle to John Wesley UMC functions and/or on John Wesley UMC business.

**Policy:** Whenever staff or volunteers use their private vehicles for field trips, business trips, canvassing, sick or elderly transportation and visitation, or the transport of children and/or youth, there are some very important risk control measures that must be taken by the church.

- Specific documentation must be supplied by all staff or volunteer drivers. This documentation should include:
  - a) current driver's license
  - b) vehicle registration, including expiration
  - c) proof of automobile liability insurance
  - d) a current safety inspection certificate, where applicable

When you consider that each time a driver gets behind the wheel as a church staff member or volunteer to transport others, the lives of others and the future of the church are in that driver's hands. If an accident resulting in tort action should occur, the church will be named as an additional defendant. Whether or not the church will be held liable will be a matter for the court to decide. However, the fewer precautions taken by the church in the selection of drivers and vehicles, the more likely the church will be found negligent. The plaintiff will allege that the church knew or should have known such facts as a staff member or volunteer having a suspended license, a vehicle failing its last safety inspection, or lack of automobile liability coverage. Assuming any staff member or volunteer driver and vehicle meet requirements merely because these requirements are law is a poor defense.

- In addition to the required documentation, each driver should be supplied with a written copy of regulations to be observed. These regulations should include the following:
  - a) All drivers must be 21 years of age or older.
  - b) The number of passengers may not exceed the number of working passenger seat restraints.
  - c) The driver and all passengers must wear seat restraints at all times.
- Drivers who transport a single child or youth (such as giving a youth a ride home from a church event) may take care to avoid any implication of impropriety by asking the child or youth to sit in the rear seat of the car.
- When using rental cars, the event organizer is responsible for verifying the rental company's policy regarding drivers (age, multiple drivers, insurance, etc.).
- 16-passenger vans will not be used to transport people.

**Implementation:** It is the responsibility of the event organizer to distribute this document to each staff member or volunteer driver and to enforce the policy.

## Appendix B

John Wesley United Methodist Church, 1927 West Kemper Road, Cincinnati, Ohio 45249

### SELF-DISCLOSURE AND CONSENT FORM

1. Do you have a valid driver's license?
2. Have you had a driver's license or other license (e.g., professional) suspended or revoked?
3. Have you ever been arrested or charged with driving under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs?
4. Have you ever been convicted of a criminal offense (felony or misdemeanor, except for minor traffic violations)?
5. Have you ever been charged with and/or convicted of child abuse, neglect, or a crime involving actual or attempted sexual molestation of a minor?
6. Have you ever been reported to a social services agency, law enforcement authority, child abuse registry, or similar organization regarding abuse or misconduct involving a minor?
7. Have you ever been the subject of an investigation or allegation of sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, or other immoral behavior or conduct involving adults or children?
8. Have you ever been subjected to expulsion, dismissal from employment, reprimand, or other discipline by an employer, church, denomination, or other religious organization for any reason?
9. Is there any fact or circumstance about you or your background that would call into question the advisability of entrusting you with the supervision, guidance, and care of children or youth?

If you have answered "Yes" to any of the above questions, please explain on the back of this paper. Use additional paper if needed.

### ATTEST STATEMENT

Under penalty of perjury, I affirm that the information given above is true, complete, and correct.

I understand and agree that a complete background investigation may be conducted with respect to me, including asking for my fingerprints, and that this information may be verified by contacting persons and organizations with whom I have had contact or that may have information concerning me. I consent to this possible background investigation and possible fingerprinting in advance.

I hereby release and agree to hold harmless from liability any person or organization that provides such information. I also agree to release and hold harmless the congregation of John Wesley United Methodist Church, their officers, employees, agents, or volunteers.

I agree to inform my supervisor of any changes to the above self-disclosure form.

Applicant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor Signature/Title: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix C**

John Wesley United Methodist Church  
1927 West Kemper Road  
Cincinnati, Ohio 45240

**POLICY AWARENESS ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

After reviewing the John Wesley United Methodist Church's policy for protection of children and youth, all clergy, paid staff, and volunteers who teach or work with children and/or youth must sign this form, indicating their familiarity with the policy.

I have read and I understand the policy entitled John Wesley United Methodist Church, Children and Youth Safety and Protection Policy.

I agree to abide by this policy for the protection of children and youth and the prevention and management of child abuse.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor Signature/Title: \_\_\_\_\_