

**Mercer Island United Methodist Church
YOUTH AND CHILDREN SAFE CHURCH POLICY**

March 4, 2007

A. INTRODUCTION

It is the intention and responsibility of MIUMC 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 those working with youth/children. God calls us to be and offer sanctuary.

B. SCOPE

This policy and its provisions shall apply to all paid and unpaid staff who have contact with youth/children participating in any church activities or events, whether lay or clergy.

This policy shall also apply to the staff of any organization using MIUMC facilities when the organization does not have an equivalent youth-safety policy.

C. 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 tend to the safety and spiritual growth of all of our youth/children, as well as the workers with them.

D. PROCEDURE FOR UPDATING AND REVISING THE YOUTH AND CHILDREN SAFE-CHURCH POLICY

- I. The Administrative/Church Council of MIUMC shall have the authority to revise and update these policies.
- II. Under exceptional circumstances, the policy supervisor has authority to waive policy at the advanced request of event leaders.

I. YOUTH AND CHILDREN ACTIVITY GUIDELINES

A. GENERAL SAFETY REQUIREMENTS

1. Parents deserve advance notice and full information regarding any church-related activities or meetings for their youth/children.
2. Mercers Island UMC will stay insured for abuse, risk, and facility hazards.
3. There shall be a first aid kit on the premises, and first aid training is encouraged.
4. Medical permission forms are required from all youth/children participating in off-site church events. These forms shall accompany the adult coordinator of the event 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.

B. DRIVING REGULATIONS

1. Only licensed drivers 18 or older may drive youth/children to or from or during a church-related activity.
2. If an adult other than a parent, guardian or family member provides rides to or from a church event or meeting for youth/children, the parent or guardian must provide written (preferred) or verbal permission to the driver.
3. If a youth drives to an event or meeting, the youth who is driving shall have permission to drive to the event from his/her parents.
4. There shall be no “in and out” privileges for youth/children. Exceptions to this rule may only be approved by the event leader.

C. 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 there is no divider available, boys and girls shall be at least six feet apart from each other.

D. POLICY SUPERVISOR

1. Mercer Island UMC shall have a designated Policy Supervisor who will oversee the implementation of the Safe Church Policy. The Policy Supervisor will ensure that State Patrol background clearances are made for volunteers and staff that will be in contact with youth and children, and keep the background checks in a secure place.

2. If the conference requires Mercer Island UMC to have a Conference Designated Safety Officer (DSO), the Policy Supervisor will be asked to assume that role and be trained accordingly.
3. The Policy Supervisor is also responsible for serving as the resource person on abuse issues, for receiving abuse reports, and for seeing that all persons who need to know of abuses are informed.
4. The Policy Supervisor is responsible for carefully documenting all aspects of an abuse incident on the Abuse Incident Report Form. This report shall be forwarded immediately to the pastor, District Superintendent, and Conference Office, and to any other group with need to know.
5. If a person reports that they have been abused in another setting, the Policy Supervisor shall consult with the event leaders or other oversight staff and they shall make a determination of who should be informed.

E. POLICY FOR SCREENING PAID AND VOLUNTEER STAFF

1. 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 in advance of their service. (These documents need to be sent or called into the Conference Office.)
2. Those who are not residents of Washington or who have resided in Washington less than three years shall provide three reference checks from a prior church, school or employer who is not related to the applicant. The Policy Supervisor shall retain copies of these documents.
3. Prior to the beginning of each new school year, the Policy Supervisor shall ensure that checks are completed for every adult who is involved in the program or will be involved. As others join, they will need to fill out background checks.
4. An adult working in a role with youth/children operating under the auspices of another organization with a similar or equivalent youth safety policy requiring a Criminal History check is exempt from the church's Criminal History check so long as the adult is in compliance with the other organization's youth safety policy. This exemption shall apply only to activities sponsored by the other organization; should the adult also be involved with Church-sponsored youth activities, they must complete a Criminal History check with the church as well.
5. A criminal conviction for a sexual offense disqualifies an applicant from working with youth/children. Other disqualifiers include convictions for incest, assaults involving minors, murder, kidnapping, domestic violence and physical abuse.

II. CODE OF BEHAVIOR

A. RULES OF GENERAL SUPERVISION FOR ADULTS WORKING WITH YOUTH/CHILDREN

1. Adults engaged in church-related events or activities with youth/children present should never engage in sexually suggestive behavior or inappropriate touching.
2. The following guidelines for touching are to be followed by anyone working with youth/children:
 - a. Touching should generally 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, and side-on hugs of the shoulders. Frontal hugs are appropriate only when initiated by the child/youth.
 - b. Touching between an adult and a youth/child shall only occur in the presence of other adults.
 - c. A youth's or child's preference not to be touched shall always be respected.
3. 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.
4. All adults shall avoid being alone, one-on-one, with youth/children unless parental permission has been specifically given. Generally, interaction with youth/children shall be conducted within the sight/supervision of at least one other adult. In cases where one-on-one interactions are unavoidable, the following guidelines shall be observed:
 - a. If an adult or leader is alone with youth/children, two or more youth/children shall be present with the adult or leader.
 - b. When private consultation is needed between a youth/child and an adult, and it is not reasonable to obtain parental permission in the moment, conditions that allow both for privacy and visibility will be sought. (e.g. door left open, monitor invited to walk by/look through window, etc.)
5. There shall be a minimum of one adult for every eight youth/children participating in events.
6. There will be 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 removal from the event.
7. Possession of firearms or weapons of any kind is forbidden.

8. All adults working with youth/children shall abide by all laws and regulations applicable to the location of the event.

B. YOUTH/CHILD BEHAVIOR

Adults will ensure that behavior expectations are communicated and respectful toward all involved.

III. RESPONSES TO CODE INFRACTIONS AT AN ACTIVITY OR EVENT

A. RESPONDING TO BEHAVIORS THAT HINDER OUR MISSION

In addition to the behaviors that are described above, there are other behaviors that may hinder the mission and purpose of our church or church group. Examples of these incidents include a chaperone who continually undermines program objectives or an event planner who neglects staff training or health and safety concerns, etc.

When serious concerns arise:

1. The event coordinator or leader shall encourage the person raising the concern to talk directly with the person whose behavior is considered detrimental.
2. Anonymous complaints or evaluations shall be considered unverifiable, and, therefore, will have no foundation for being officially addressed.
3. If the person whose behavior is a concern is the event coordinator/leader then the person who is raising the concern may report to the Policy Supervisor, Staff Parish Relations Committee, or other person assigned to oversee this leader.
4. The church has the obligation to inform the Annual Conference of all persons whose behavior they deem to be inappropriate for working with youth and children.

B. RESPONDING TO INCIDENTS INVOLVING PHYSICAL ACCIDENTS

1. The person who witnesses the accident shall share this information with the leader at the event or activity. The leader will make sure that an Accident Report Form is filled out and notify the parents of the youth/children involved in the incident as deemed necessary.
2. A copy of the accident report form will be forwarded in a timely manner to the Policy Supervisor of the church.
3. The event coordinator/leader shall make contacts as needed with the Conference insurance company, and the pastor of the church. This coordinator shall also determine whether there is need for an investigation or additional follow-up.

C. RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE

1. All reports of abuse shall be treated with utmost seriousness and confidentiality.

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.
3. 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, then the report should be made to the Policy Supervisor, pastor, or the authorities.
4. The event coordinator/leader (if not implicated) and Policy Supervisor (when even coordinator/leader implicated) are responsible for filling out the Abuse Incident Report Form and for reporting the incident to the key leaders of the church and pastor.
5. The person who first hears the allegation of abuse, in partnership with the Policy Supervisor and (unless implicated) event leader, is responsible for reporting to the Child Protective Services or to the appropriate law enforcement/civic agency.
6. The Policy Supervisor will notify the parents when and if it is clear that it is safe to do so.
7. 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 type of duties until the Policy Supervisor has completed a review. This applies whether or not the alleged act of abuse occurred during a church-related event.
8. Whether or not the alleged act occurred during a church-related event, the leader and Policy Supervisor shall jointly review the incident to determine whether any additional actions are required. They shall also ensure that the incident has been reported to appropriate parties (i.e., civil authorities, Conference insurance company, District Superintendent, Conference office, etc.). All information concerning the incident shall be held in strict confidence by all parties involved.
9. If the incident is put under investigation by appropriate civil authorities, the investigation will be monitored by the Policy Supervisor and church officials until there is an outcome. Investigating will be the responsibility of civil authorities.
10. If there is no civil investigation or once the investigation by civil authorities is completed, the Policy Supervisor and/or leaders shall jointly review the incident to determine whether any further actions are needed.
11. The Policy Supervisor is responsible for contacting the accused and informing

the accused of the nature of the process. 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.

12. After conducting a thorough review, the Policy Supervisor shall report the findings to the accused. If it is determined that the person has committed an act of abuse, the final goal of this process is to establish a future 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 solutions about what should be done in the future.
13. If no covenant is established, the accused shall remain removed from working with youth/children in the church until mediation is complete.
14. If no covenant is established, the accused may pick one mediator and the coordinator another mediator. These two mediators will then pick a third mediator, and these three people, combined with the accused and the coordinator, will come to a decision. The mutually-agreed upon mediator will serve as the facilitator for this group.
15. The covenant that governs participation in church-related youth/children events shall clearly state that failure to abide by the provisions of the covenant process shall result in permanent removal from working with youth/children in the church.
16. All documentation relating to the incident shall be confidentially filed in the Policy Supervisor's secure files.
17. 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 church-related events involving youth/children. The purpose of this list is to screen those who are requesting to work with youth/children.
18. If a person is under some form of removal due to violation of any of these policies/guidelines and fails to report the same to a local church when initiating a desire to work with youth/children, that person shall be permanently removed from working with youth/children at all UMC events.
19. The church's obligations to respond to allegations of abuse go beyond the State's requirements. As Christians, we must also be prepared to respond to others:
 - Faithful response to the victim
 - take the allegations very seriously
 - respect victim's privacy
 - provide sympathetic concern
 - no blaming the victim

- absolutely no implication that the victim was in any way responsible for causing the abuse.
- Faithful response to the Annual Conference
 - notify PNW Conference authorities (District Superintendent, Bishop) as soon as allegations are received
 - keep them aware of congregation's actions
 - notify insurance agent.
- Faithful response to the media
 - one person must be designated as spokesperson in advance and have a well-thought out, previously written out response.
- Faithful response to the accused
 - acknowledge that the person is of sacred worth
 - remove accused abuser from position as a worker with youth/children until allegations are fully investigated and resolved.

D. RESPONDING TO ILLEGAL BEHAVIOR

Any volunteer or hired staff person accused of felonious activity shall be immediately relieved of duties related to this or any other church-sponsored event and shall 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. If the felonious activity was not committed during a church-related event, then the Policy Supervisor along with the pastor or leader shall have discretion as to whether immediate or remedial action is required following the same procedures as listed above (see III.C.1-19). The individual accused of felonious activity may not return to duties until the church leadership has completed a review.

IV. CRISIS COMMUNICATION

- A. A well-thought out plan of response should be kept on file with clergy, program staff persons, and the Policy Supervisor
- B. The Church Council shall designate an official spokesperson who is equipped for the task.
- C. The spokesperson for the church should be a person who can speak calmly and thoughtfully in the glare of publicity; the person should answer questions honestly without adding extra or unnecessary information. They should be given permission to answer questions by saying, "I or we don't know at this time." NO ONE but the spokesperson is authorized to speak on behalf of the congregation. Spokesperson must be prepared to state the church's policy for the prevention of child abuse, the church's concern for the safety of the victim and all children, and the procedures the church has followed to reduce the risk of abuse. The spokesperson 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.
- D. The District Superintendent and Bishop shall be informed of all investigations or allegations of abuse.

Mercer Island United Methodist Church
ALLEGED ABUSE REPORT FORM

Instructions:

- To be completed by the person observing or receiving disclosure of alleged abuse.
- Upon completion, file this report with the Safe Church Policy Supervisor or church pastor.

Your name & position	
Victim's name	
Name of person making disclosure (if not victim)	
Date and Time of observation or disclosure	
Date and Time of incident if different from above	
Brief statement of observed or disclosure of alleged abuse	
Name of church official you will give this report to	
Your signature	
Date signed	
Church official's signature & position	
Date signed	
Policy Supervisor's signature	
Date signed	

REPORT OF SUSPECTED INCIDENT OF YOUTH ABUSE

Instructions:

- To be completed by the adult in charge of the youth event or the Safe Church Policy Supervisor.
- ***This is a confidential report.*** Do not discuss the contents of this report with anyone except the Safe Church Policy Supervisor, church pastor, or church lay leader.
- As you complete these pages, detail is good, but remember to consider the state of mind of the victim. Capture details of what is reported or observed without interjecting opinion or conjecture. Consider the seriousness of this report as well as its confidentiality.
- Use the reverse side of these (or attach additional) pages if you need more room.
- File this report with the Safe Church Policy Supervisor and church pastor.

Your Name & Title	
Date of report	
Name of person reporting incident	
Did this person observe the incident or was this a report to them?	

Date/Time/Place of incident	
Brief notes	
Witness name/phone/ contact info	
Witness Statement	

Victim's Name	
Victim's Church	
Victim's Age/Date of Birth	
Date & Time of Abuse (if known)	
Date/time/place of initial conversation with victim	
Victim's statements	
Name of Alleged Abuser	
Relationship of accused to victim	
Date/time/place of initial conversation with accused	
Notes of conversation	
	<i>Call made to staff person responsible for event</i>

Date/Time	
Person spoke with	
Conversation Notes	
	<i>Call made to parent(s)/Guardian(s)</i>
Date/Time	
Person spoke with	
Conversation Notes	
	<i>Call made to local family agency (if appropriate)</i>
Date/Time	
Person spoke with	
Conversation Notes	
	<i>Call made to law enforcement agency (if appropriate)</i>

Date/Time	
Person spoke with	
Conversation Notes	
	<i>Other Contacts</i>
Name/date/notes	
Name/date/notes	