

**WETHERSFIELD UNITED METHODIST  
CHURCH**

**SAFE SANCTUARY POLICIES**

**PREVENTION OF CHILD ABUSE**

**EMPLOYEES AND  
WORKERS WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

**For questions about this Policy contact the  
Pastor(s) or Chair(s) of Staff Parish Relations Committee**

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## **PURPOSE**

It is an important purpose for the members and staff of the Wethersfield United Methodist Church (WUMC) to provide a safe and secure environment for preschoolers, children, youth and people with disabilities entrusted to our care. We do this to encourage those preschoolers, children and youth and their families to grow in their relationship with God and one another.

A safe and secure environment includes a formal, written policy to help prevent the occurrence of child abuse. The following policy and procedures are for the protection of our preschoolers, children, youth, employees and workers.

## **SCOPE**

This policy shall apply to all current and future workers, employees and youth workers, compensated and/or volunteer, who will have the responsibility of supervising, directing, coordinating, teaching and/or assisting the activities of preschoolers, children, youth and people with disabilities. This policy will be reviewed every two years by the Staff Parish Relations Committee and updated as required.

## **DEFINITIONS**

1. “Preschooler,” “child,” “children,” “youth,” and “minor” shall be defined as any individual under the age of eighteen (18) (or whose mental capacity is that of a minor).
2. “Adult” shall be defined as any individual at least eighteen (18) years of age.
3. “Worker” shall be defined as any adult who serves as a volunteer and/or paid person given the responsibility of working with or caring for minors. The following positions fall under the definition of “worker” for the WUMC: Church School Teachers, Coordinator(s) for Older Children’s Church, Coordinator(s) for Younger Children’s Church, Helper’s for Younger Children’s Church and Leader(s) for Gospel

Martial Arts. “Worker” does not include church members or non-members volunteering for a specific church activity not specifically involving children. Some of these activities include Harvest of the Heart or Church Clean-Up Days.

4. “Employee” for the purposes of this policy shall be all persons who are paid by the church, whether full or part time, and whether employee or independent contractor, and all unpaid volunteers who work with children and youth in a supervisory (staff) capacity such as Sunday School and Youth program coordinators, administrators or superintendents and the chairperson(s) of the church committee(s) that oversees those programs. The WUMC employee positions include, but are not limited to: Pastor(s), Administrative Assistant, Organist, Choir Director(s), Visitation Minister, Toddler Children’s Church Coordinators, Cribbery Coordinators, Youth Program Coordinators, Christian Education Director and Children’s Ministry Coordinator.
5. “Youth worker” shall be defined as any worker at least 12 years old or older, but under the age of eighteen (18) enlisted to assist with the care of minors.
6. “Child Abuse” shall be defined as verbal, physical, emotional, or sexual abuse of a preschooler, child, youth or minor. For a legal definition, see Child Abuse Prevention Reporting instruction sheet.
7. “Criminal Background Check” (“CBC”) is the procedure used to perform a check of the background of adult employees and volunteer workers for criminal activity.
8. “Confidential Screening Committee” A three (3) member committee consisting of the Pastor, Chair of SPR and Lay-Leader who are responsible for reviewing the CBC and application forms.

## **WHAT IS CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE?**

“Child sexual abuse is any sexual activity with a child – whether in the home by a caretaker, in a church, a day care situation, a foster/residential setting, or in any other setting, including on the street by a person unknown to the child. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent, or another child, provided the child is four years older than the victim.”

Child sexual abuse may be violent or non-violent. All child sexual abuse is an exploitation of a child’s vulnerability and powerlessness in which the abuser is fully responsible for the action.

Child sexual abuse is criminal behavior that involves children in sexual behaviors for which they are not personally, socially and developmentally ready.

Child sexual abuse includes behaviors that involve touching and non- touching aspects.

It is the policy of Wethersfield United Methodist Church (WUMC) to follow the *Basic Procedures for Safe Ministry with Children and Youth* depicted below. We require all paid staff and unpaid volunteers to abide by the policy and procedures outlined herein.

## **Basic Procedures for Safe Ministry with Children and Youth**

Based in part on *Safe Sanctuaries - Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church*<sup>1</sup>

Each of the following procedures is important in our congregation's comprehensive prevention strategy. They are not listed in order of importance.

### **The "Six Months Involvement Rule"**

The "Six Months Involvement Rule" requires all volunteers who work with children and youth to be involved with the church for at least six months before they are allowed in any position involving contact with minors.

### **The "Two Adult Rule"**

The "Two Adult Rule" requires no fewer than two adults present at all times during a church sponsored program, event or ministry involving children or youth. Risk will be reduced more if the two adults are unrelated. Abusers thrive on secrecy, isolation and their ability to manipulate victims. When abusers know they will not be left alone, they may lose interest in working with children.

### **The "Five-Years Older Rule"**

Leaders of youth ministry should be a minimum of five years older than the oldest youth.

### **No Workers under age 18**

Putting children in charge of children invites disaster. It is common practice in many churches to allow junior or high school aged volunteers to supervise nursery or young children. People under the age of eighteen cannot be expected to have developed the maturity and judgment that is needed to fully respond to young children. However, people under age eighteen can assist a responsible adult, but they should not substitute for an adult under the Two Adult Rule (see above). Youth volunteers must be at least 12 years old to be permitted to volunteer with youth.

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<sup>1</sup> Melton, Joy Thornburg, *Safe Sanctuaries for Youth, Reducing the Risk of Abuse in Youth Ministries, Discipleship Resources*. Go to: [www.discipleshipresources.org](http://www.discipleshipresources.org) and search on "Safe Sanctuaries."

### Windows in All Classroom Doors

Each room set aside for children and youth should have a door with a window in it or half door. A window removes the opportunity for secrecy and isolation. A half door offers protection against children wandering outside the classroom and allows for full visual access. Any classroom doors without windows should remain open at all times.

### Open-Door Counseling

At any counseling sessions with children or youth, the doors in the room used should remain open for the entire session, ideally when others are nearby even though not in listening distance. Counseling sessions conducted behind closed doors are a breeding ground for false allegations of abuse. Closed doors make it easy for a child abuser.

### Advance Notice to Parents

A basic rule with children and youth ministry is to always give parents advance notice and full information regarding the event(s) in which their children will participate. Before the off-site event, parents must give written permission for their child to participate. Churches are protected insofar as the parent has been informed of the event. Advance information gives a guideline to parents about scheduling and allows parent and child to decide if the event and its content is suitable for their participation. It also demonstrates that the church has planned thoroughly to provide the safest experience.

### Parent and Family Education

When a congregation has a commitment to a comprehensive plan for the prevention of child abuse with its ministries, it will want to provide information about the plan to the congregation and parents.

### Appropriate Equipment and Supervision

It is very important for those planning ministries with children and youth to think through in advance, the advantages and disadvantages of the setting they are considering. If the ministry involves using special equipment (ie. gymnasium/recreational equipment, electronics, mechanical/motorized equipment), knowledge of its operation should be familiar. Incredible as it seems, children are often left alone on a playground while adults are inside at dinner. A child can be injured or taken by a stranger without a single adult witness. Do not let our church take the risk!

### Adequate Insurance for the Scope of Our Ministry

WUMC maintains adequate insurance for our church and its ministries, and complies with the New York Annual Conference's requirements regarding a church's safe sanctuaries program. Our specific screening process for certain staff and volunteers is detailed in the *Employee and Worker Enlistment Procedure* section.

## **EMPLOYEE AND WORKER ENLISTMENT PROCEDURE**

1. All current employees and workers of the Church (both paid and unpaid as defined above) desiring to work with minors will be required to complete a Volunteer Application and Confidential Screening Form. Employees hired or appointed to a position after the implementation of this policy will be required to complete an Employment Application and Confidential Screening Form.
2. After an application is received, prior employment and volunteer service and personal references will be checked.
3. Any prospective employee or worker that has prior incidents of sexual misconduct or child abuse will not be allowed to serve in any capacity where they would have contact with minors.
4. Criminal background checks will be performed on each employee (as defined above) after the applicant has signed the Background Investigation Consent form, and prior to being enlisted as an employee. Criminal background checks may be performed on any worker randomly or as deemed necessary. Criminal background checks will be performed on all employees. After five years a new criminal background check will again be performed.
5. Only members of the Confidential Screening Committee of the church will have access to the criminal background check report. Each applicant will be given a signed copy of the Church Privacy Statement disclosing those officials who serve on the Confidential Screening Committee. Recommendations will be given by the Confidential Screening Committee to the Staff Parish Relations Committee or other appropriate individual(s) or committee as to the qualification of applicants.
6. For all Employment Applications received after the implementation of this policy, standard interview questions will be developed and used in personal interviews with employee applicants. This occurs after reviewing the applications of the applicant, checking all references and receiving a criminal background check report. These interview sheets will be filled out with the results of the interview and kept in a secure, confidential

supervisory file, together with the reference checks, the applications and the criminal background check report, if any. A separate supervisory file will be maintained permanently on each employee and worker, whether paid or volunteer.

7. All church sponsored programs for children and youth will at all times observe the Church's Basic Procedures for Safe Ministry with Children and Youth, and all employees and workers must agree to abide by the church's Code of Ethics.
8. At the applicant's request, the church shall allow the applicant to review his/her criminal history record transcript at the church, but in no event shall the church allow the applicant to retain and/or copy the transcript of his/her criminal background check.
9. The church shall immediately notify the Confidential Screening Committee or other qualified church official if an internal grievance (applicant dispute) is filed by an applicant because of incorrect information or other reasons related to criminal histories provided by the agency.

## **EMPLOYEE AND WORKER TRAINING**

Each new worker/employee will be given the legal definition of child abuse in writing which is contained in the Child Abuse Prevention Reporting instruction sheet with their Application. All workers/employees will sign the Code of Ethics and agree to follow the Basic Procedures for Safe Ministry with Children and Youth. New workers/employees will be provided with written materials made available on this subject to help them gain an appreciation for the reality of the concern. This will help workers identify child abuse in the future if they see signs of it.

## **VOLUNTEER INFORMATION FORMS**

Employees and workers will be required to complete either an Employment Application or Volunteer Application and Screening forms providing personal and confidential information necessary to allow the church to perform criminal background checks and reference checks on each individual employee and worker (as required). While this process understandably trespasses into the privacy of our lives, the security of our children outweighs the personal invasion inherent with such investigation and disclosures. All personal information voluntarily disclosed, the results of all criminal background and reference checks or the refusal of any person to participate in a program or activity in lieu of such disclosure requirements will be maintained in the strictest of confidence.

### **APPLICATION FORMS**

Adult worker and employee application forms shall include the following:

#### Application and Screening Form with Attachments

- Code of Ethics
- Basic Procedures for Safe Ministry with Children and Youth
- Application Form (Volunteer or Employment, as applicable)
- Confidential Screening Form
- Background Investigation Consent
- Church Privacy Statement
- Child Abuse Prevention Reporting

Youth worker application form shall include the following:

#### Screening Form for Youth

- Youth Application Form
- Basic Procedures for Safe Ministry with Children and Youth

## **WORKER, EMPLOYEE AND VOLUNTEER DISQUALIFICATION**

The following items will automatically disqualify a worker, employee or volunteer from participating in the leadership, sponsorship or supervising of any activities or programs with minors:

Any conviction for the following or its out of state equivalent:

- Crimes related to the possession, use or sale of drugs or controlled substances within the last five years
- Criminal homicide
- Aggravated assault
- Sexual abuse
- Sexual assault (rape)
- Aggravated sexual assault
- Injury to a child
- Incest
- Indecency with a child
- Inducing sexual conduct or sexual performance of a child
- Possession or promotion of child pornography
- The sale, distribution, or display of harmful material to a minor
- Employment harmful to children
- Abandonment or endangerment of a child
- Kidnapping or unlawful restraint
- Public lewdness or indecent exposure
- Enticing a child
- Risk of injury to a child/Impairing the morals of a child

All charges for these crimes or charges or convictions for any other crimes not listed above will be reviewed by the members of the Confidential Screening Committee and the Church's Privacy Statement shall be faithfully followed.

## **SPECIFIC ACTS AND OMISSIONS IN VIOLATION OF THE POLICY**

The following acts and omissions are violations of the Policy and will not be tolerated or accepted during any activity or program and are to be immediately reported to the designated program staff after the safety of the child, children, youth or minor involved has been assured.

- Any direct observations or evidence of sexual activity in the presence of or in association with a minor.
- Any display or demonstration of sexual activity, abuse, insinuation of abuse or evidence of abusive conduct toward a minor.
- Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between any person and a minor.
- Infliction of physically abusive behavior or bodily injury to a minor.
- Physical neglect of a minor, including failure to provide adequate supervision in relation to the activities of the church.
- Mental or emotional injury to a minor.
- The presence or possession of obscene or pornographic materials at any function of the church.
- The presence, possession, consumption of or being under the influence of any illegal or illicit drugs or alcohol while leading or participating in a function for minors at the church.

## **EMPLOYEE AND WORKER SUPERVISION**

1. The church will follow the Basic Procedures for Safe Ministry with Children and Youth as they be adopted and amended from time to time. In particular, the church will follow the “two adult” rule, which means no adult shall be left alone with a child.
2. Church staff and volunteer directors will supervise on an ongoing basis and make unannounced visits into classes or other program sites from time to time to monitor activities.
3. An identification system shall be adopted for children ages two and younger so that the adults who drop off a child are the same adults who pick up the child.

4. In counseling sessions with minors, parental permission shall be obtained prior to a minister meeting privately with a minor, or the two adult rule shall be used in that instance. Prior permission may be granted by parents to cover a particular time period (i.e. a school year) for their child to receive counseling from a particular minister.
5. Approved workers on duty shall wear a name tag.
6. Educate all workers and employees who work with minors as to the church's policies and procedures concerning this matter.

### **OCCASIONAL YOUTH VOLUNTEER WORKERS**

Youth less than eighteen (18) years of age wanting to serve as youth workers in any capacity with activities, studies, or programs for preschoolers or children will need to fill in a Youth Volunteer Information Form and read the Basic Procedures for Safe Ministry with Children & Youth. Youths must be assigned in accordance with the Five-Years Older Rule (see Basic Procedures for Safe Ministry with Children and Youth).

### **CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION REPORTING**

Connecticut has laws requiring reports to a child abuse hotline when a caregiver has cause to suspect that child abuse or neglect has occurred. These laws focus on situations when the alleged abuser is a family member or other responsible persons (such as a church worker). When the alleged abuser is not a family member or other responsible person, the matter is not reportable to the hotline, but rather is for the criminal justice system. Determining whether or not an incident is reportable requires an investigation (which must be conducted immediately and a decision made virtually immediately and in no case longer than 24 hours after the first report of the incident). Detailed procedures for handling reporting can be found in the attachment: Child Abuse Reporting- Connecticut, located in the Application and Screening Form document.

### **WUMC POLICY ON SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE REPORTING**

It is the policy of our church to voluntarily report all reportable incidents of suspected child sexual or physical abuse to the child abuse hotline regardless of whether such reports are mandatory or voluntary under Connecticut state law. Further, church volunteers who suspect there may be a case of reportable sexual abuse are to report the allegation directly to the WUMC Pastor, Youth Minister or a staff representative of Children's Ministry.

## CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION REPORTING - CONNECTICUT

Any person having cause to believe that a child's physical or mental health or welfare has been or may be adversely affected by abuse or neglect shall report the person's belief in accordance with this procedure<sup>2</sup>. Non-accusatory reports (reports that identify the victim of abuse or neglect whether or not the person responsible for the abuse or neglect is known) shall be made to the local or state law enforcement agency (police) by calling 911.

As stated previously, it is the policy of the Church to voluntarily report all reportable incidents of suspected child sexual or physical abuse to the child abuse hotline regardless of whether such reports are mandatory or voluntary under Connecticut state law. Further, church volunteers who suspect there may be a case of reportable sexual abuse are to report the allegation directly to the WUMC Pastor, Youth Minister or a staff representative of Children's Ministry.

In cases where the alleged abuser is a *guardian, member of the victim's household or other responsible person*<sup>3</sup>, reports go to the Connecticut Department of Children and Families (see below). Connecticut General Statutes Section 17a-101 *does* specifically name clergypersons as mandatory reporters in such cases. Information of reportable sexual abuse that comes to a minister, including information obtained in a clergy penitent, counseling situation, must be reported. Local church leaders, including church program staff, Sunday school teachers, youth group leaders and Christian education coordinators that work with church Sunday schools and youth groups, whether paid or volunteer, have no mandatory duty to report under the statute but may make voluntary reports. However, personnel of *state licensed* day care centers or nursery schools located on church property (whether or not run by the church) *are mandatory reporters*:

DCF Hotline Number: 800-842-2288

Where the alleged abuser is *not a family member or other responsible person* (see footnote 3), the case would be handled by the criminal justice system and reported in the first instance to the police.

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<sup>2</sup> "*Child abuse*" is defined by Connecticut General Statutes Section 46b-120 as a child who has had non-accidental physical injury(ies) inflicted upon him or her, or has injuries which are at variance with the history of them, or is in a condition which is the result of maltreatment, such as, but not limited to, malnutrition, sexual molestation or exploitation, deprivation of necessities, emotional maltreatment or cruel punishment. "*Child neglect*" is defined by the same statute as a child who has been abandoned, is being denied proper care physically, emotionally, or morally, or is being permitted to live under conditions, associations or circumstances injurious to his or her well-being.

<sup>3</sup> An "other responsible person" is anyone legally responsible for the victim at the time of the alleged abuse or who has been given access to the victim such responsible person. For the Church this would mean, for example, anyone involved in running the Sunday School including a teacher or assistant.

## PROCEDURE GOVERNING SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE

Upon the first suspicion of an instance of child abuse, the following steps should be taken immediately:

- a. Do not treat the suspicion as frivolous.
  - b. **Maintain maximum confidentiality of the investigation.** Persons reporting in good faith are immune if reports are made that turn out to be unfounded. Emphasize confidentiality of the victim and any accused.
  - c. If a report is mandated, the first person receiving the initial information from the victim must report it to the mandatory reporter, whether or not that person is able to consult with his or her supervisor or other person(s) in charge. The report must be made by telephone within 24 hours. In the case of Sunday School, for instance, the mandatory reporter would often be the minister, since a Sunday School teacher or other worker first receiving the information would not be a mandatory reporter. In the case of a licensed weekday nursery school, the teacher would be a mandatory reporter and would make the report.
  - d. The individual making a mandatory report, if a member of the staff, must notify the “person in charge or his designee.” The person in charge must notify the parents or guardians of the victim.
- 2) When an incident occurs that requires a mandatory report, the person receiving the initial information, in cooperation with the person supervising the activity in which the victim was participating and a paid minister of the church, must commence the investigation immediately, and conclude it as soon as possible. In the case of an incident permitting a voluntary report, the minister should be responsible for confirming the facts reported and the condition of the child and making a decision to report to the appropriate agency (described above).
- a. Use the “Checklist for Response to Allegation of Sexual Abuse” (located in the *Safe Sanctuaries Forms* document) to complete the church/staff responsibilities involved with the occurrence.
  - b. Data concerning the child, name, address and other pertinent information will be obtained through discussions with the initial

reporter and other staff members. The name and address of the person responsible for the care of the child, if available, will be obtained.

- c. A prompt determination as to whether a report to the State sexual abuse hotline is required. In determining whether or not to make a report, a small team approach with consultations with others directly involved, including a trustee of demonstrated sound judgment, should be used to determine whether there is reasonable grounds for believing that the abuse occurred, and that the accused is a person responsible for the child at the alleged time of the abuse (see discussion above).
  - d. The investigation and the determination as to whether a report is required must be undertaken promptly, because a telephone [or fax] report must be made within 24 hours of receiving the original information. On the same day that the case is first reported verbally to the Hotline, the report will be documented on a Report of Suspected Child Abuse<sup>4</sup>. This form must be sent by the reporter within forty-eight (48) hours after the oral report was made to the Child Abuse Hotline, and a copy must be given to the victim's parent or guardian and (if not the reporter) to the minister.
- 3) Simultaneously, the minister, in consultation with the parents of the victim, shall determine whether to report the alleged abuse to local law enforcement officials (police). Cooperate fully with law enforcement officials.
  - 4) The Church should also immediately contact the insurance company to report the occurrence, and should contact its attorney.
  - 5) In instances where child abuse is confirmed and a member of the ministerial staff is the perpetrator, the District Superintendent must be contacted, advised and involved.
  - 6) Suspend any accused from the performance of duties involving children until the investigation has been completed.
  - 7) Inform the victim and the victim's family of the steps that are being taken, and continue to keep them advised of the status of the investigations. If child abuse is confirmed, ask the victim and the victim's family what action they would like to take in the matter, and fully cooperate to address their request within the bounds of a legal and prudent response (Church legal counsel should assist in this determination).

- 8) In instances where child abuse is confirmed to have been by an employee or worker, the Church should immediately dismiss the employee or worker from that position. Consideration of member termination should be considered, as appropriate in the circumstances.
- 9) In instances where the evidence is inconclusive, the Church must take action depending on the strength of the evidence available and after consideration of the victim's parent's request.
- 10) Keep the congregation informed of the investigation with respect to matters which are not confidential, so that the congregation will hear about the investigation from within the Church rather than from the news media.
- 11) Promptly take steps to plan for a response to the media and attempt to speak to the media only through one contact person so that the Church can emphasize through the media to the public the Church's position on child abuse, its concern for the victim, and the extensive steps the Church is taking to address the present occurrence and to reduce the risk and provide a safe environment for other children.

Every allegation of sexual offense or molestation should be investigated promptly and thoroughly by officials and reported to the Church insurance company immediately. If such allegation is factual, the relationship with the worker should be terminated. It is unlikely the problem will ever be handled by relying on promises of the employee or volunteer to reform. Failure to take remedial action will make a claim difficult to defend.

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<sup>4</sup> The form may be obtained in PDF format on-line at: [http://www.state.ct.us/dcf/dcf\\_136.pdf](http://www.state.ct.us/dcf/dcf_136.pdf)

## **INSURANCE**

Our church shall obtain a sufficient level of liability insurance coverage to cover child abuse and sexual misconduct claims. WUMC will maintain the appropriate levels of coverage which are required for limited immunity.

## **CONCLUSION**

Our church need to be prepared! This is the legal reason for creating safety policies, but there's a deeper, more significant reason – to protect the children. Policies are only printed expressions of the value placed on children. If the only reason for safety policies is to protect the organization, the Church has missed God's love for children.

Some people may think that our Church is too small or that our Church “knows” everyone to worry about these safety problems. Remember that it's much easier to make plans and develop safety policies as a means of prevention.

Some churches tend to take the biblical concept of trusting God to an extreme. They think nothing bad can happen to Christians. We must be wise regarding children's safety. There is no automatic protection from evil for the faithful. There will always be unforeseen circumstances that need to be handled. But the Church should build into its organization sturdy safety-policy fire blocks into the walls of its ministry to protect children.

Our Church commits to maintaining a “Safe Sanctuary” for children and youth through the implementation of the policies referenced in this document. Adoption of these provisions will enable the Church to provide a more safe and secure environment for each individual of our Church family and its guests.