

Main Street United Methodist Church Child Protection Policy

I. Purpose and Biblical Foundation

Main Street UMC seeks to express God's love of children and to provide for their personal wholeness. This caring community seeks to prevent abuse in any form to our children and youth.

“Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”
–Mark 9:37

Children are very important in the eyes of God; in the Scriptures, the church is called to minister to and love its children. The Bible is the foundation upon which all policies, procedures, and ministries must stand. Jesus teaches us explicitly that children have the right and keys to the kingdom of God. He demonstrated this through blessing and touch. Our response to the Biblical mandate is to maintain a safe, secure and loving place where children may grow; a place where caregivers, teachers, and leaders minister appropriately to their needs.

Main Street United Methodist Church seeks to establish reasonable procedures to reduce the risk of physical, emotional and sexual abuse of children as they participate in church ministries, and to protect staff and volunteers from false allegations of misconduct.

This congregation; along with more than 400 churches in the state of Virginia, is following a recommendation by the Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church to prevent abuse of any form to our children and youth, and to be in ministry to families where abuse may occur.

II. Definitions

1. Child Abuse

Child abuse refers to an act committed by a parent, caregiver or person in a position of trust (even if he/she is placed in a position of trust only occasionally) which is not accidental and which harms or threatens to harm a child's physical or mental health or welfare. (For a more detailed description of the types of child abuse, see addendum 1; for a description of Virginia child abuse laws, see addendum 2).

2. The term, "child" or children, shall include persons under the age of (18) years. This will also include children (18) or older that are currently in high school.

III. Selection of Employees and Volunteers

In an effort to create the safest possible environment, Main Street UMC will implement and utilize the following selection and screening measures:

1. Six Month Rule

For the purpose of fulfilling the requirements of this policy, volunteer persons desiring to minister to children or youth in Main Street UMC must be a member or active nonmember of this congregation for at least six (6) months before assuming such a position. The six month rule may be waived with the authorization of the Directors of Ministries (Children, Youth, Preschool and Youth and Children Choirs and Youth and Children Handbell Choirs).

2. Criminal Background Check

A criminal background check shall be required for all children's worker positions, both employee and volunteer workers. No one who has been convicted of a crime involving misconduct with children will be allowed to work with children. Completing the form: Volunteer Application and Personal Information authorizes the

church to conduct these checks. Background checks will be kept confidential in the office with access afforded only to appropriate staff and church leaders on a need-to-know basis. The administrative assistants will request criminal background checks. All reports will be reviewed by the appropriate Directors of Ministries and the Senior Pastor.

Application forms and a copy of the Child Protection Policy are available in the church office. A summary of persons with approved background checks is also available in the church office for general information.

Background checks are to be updated every 5 (five) years.

3. Minimum Age

All volunteer workers must be 18 years of age or older. Younger persons may assist adults, but may not take the place of required adult workers. The organization may employ responsible teens (under the age of 18) only in positions with and under the direct supervision of an approved adult worker. Such youth are to be 5 years older than the children being assisted. They are also to read and sign acknowledgement of our child protection policy.

4. Training

Main Street UMC will provide Child Protection Policy training to all workers on an annual basis. The training is required. If a new worker is not able to attend the annual training, a training session must be completed by the worker with one of the Directors of Ministry before working with children. Once trained, the worker must sign a statement indicating that they have received, read and support the Child Protection Policy before they begin working with children. The signed statement will be kept on file. First Aid training will be required for all paid employees who work with children and they will maintain

current certification in basic first aid and basic CPR (or the equivalent) as required by applicable licensing requirements or other local regulations. Main Street UMC will pay the cost of training. Volunteers are encouraged, but not required, to get First Aid/CPR training.

IV. Child Security Rules

1. Two Adult

All efforts will be made to have two unrelated adults present at all children activities. In the event this is not possible during Sunday School and Preschool sessions, there will be two unrelated adults in the immediate area at all times or one adult may be in attendance for a class with the doors remaining completely open. An open door includes: doors with windows with full visibility or double-dutch doors. At no time is an adult ever be in a room alone with a child and have the door shut. If the director deems that supervision will not be adequate, classes will be combined or the activity will be cancelled.

2. Unlocked Doors

A door is never to be locked while persons are inside the room.

3. Restrooms

All children age 10 and under should be escorted to the restroom as needed. Bathrooms must be checked for occupancy before children are permitted to enter.

4. Ratio of workers to children

The Director of Ministry responsible for the activity shall be primarily responsible for setting and maintaining a reasonable ratio of workers to children that is in compliance with the two-adult rule (Guideline - 1:5 for children 3 and under, 1:10 for children above the age of 3) giving due regard to all factors present, including the number and age of the participants, the nature of the activities and the location where the activities are taking place.

5. Transportation

All drivers using private vehicles for children's or youth activities will also be authorized Main Street Church van drivers. Their name and a copy of their driver's license will be submitted to our church insurance agency.

Preschool parents may sign a permission form allowing their child to ride to an event in the vehicle of an adult who is not their parent.

6. Off-Site/Overnight Events

All off-site events require a parent/guardian permission form to be on file including liability and medical information. There will be a blanket permission form to cover all events except overnight events. Overnight events will have their own permission form. Overnight events will require chaperones of each gender, when the event includes both genders.

V. Implementation, Documentation and Review

The implementation of this policy is a primary job responsibility of our Director of Children's Ministries, (Children, Youth, Preschool and Youth and Children Choirs and Youth and Children Handbell Choirs). Our Senior Pastor, the Staff Parish Relations Chairman, and the Chairman of the Child Protection Committee share responsibility for the implementation, administration and communication of this policy to the congregation.

It is the responsibility of all Directors of Children Ministries to see that volunteers and staff are properly qualified before working with children. Qualification includes background checks on file along with signed acknowledgements of our Child Protection Policy.

Documentation for all children activities is the responsibility of the appropriate Directors. Minimum documentation shall include identification of the activity, date, time, qualified adult leaders present and a listing of all adults and children present. Records are to be retained for 7 (seven) years.

It is the responsibility of the Child Protection Committee to conduct an annual review of the implementation of this policy. The results of the review will be presented to the Church Council every year in February or March.

The Charge Conference, upon nomination by the Nominations & Personnel Committee shall annually elect a Child Protection Committee. The Committee is responsible for the administration and interpretation of Main Streets Child Protection Policy. The membership of this committee shall include the Senior Pastor, the Director of Children Ministries, Director of Youth Ministries, a representative for the Preschool, a member of the Staff Parrish Relations Committee, the trustee insurance liaison and a congregational/parent member.

VI. Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

Anyone observing or becoming aware of a possible incident of child abuse or neglect shall immediately report this to an appropriate staff member and to the Senior Pastor. All allegations of abuse or neglect of any child under the care of MSUMC will be taken seriously and will be thoroughly investigated. It is the responsibility of the Senior Pastor or his designee to immediately begin the following steps in reporting and investigating the allegations:

1. Immediately begin documenting all reported incidents of allegations as well as all steps taken in reporting and investigating the allegations. Observe strict confidentiality for the alleged, both the victim and the accused. This documentation will remain in MSUMC files.
2. Notify the parent or guardian of the child or children involved.

The Pastor should show care and comfort for the alleged victim and extend whatever care and resources are necessary throughout the investigation.

3. The worker (employee or volunteer) accused of the abuse or neglect is to be immediately removed from working with children, pending completion of the investigation.
4. Report the allegations made to the Chairman of SPRC, Chairman of Child Protection Committee and our insurance company MSUMC Trustee contact.
5. Notify the Department of Social Services of the allegation if the nature of the alleged incidents warrants such action.
6. Notify the UMC District Superintendent if the nature of the alleged incidents warrants such action. The District Superintendent may elect to contact the Conference Response Team. If contacted, the Conference Response Team will send a representative to MSUMC within 24 hours to conduct an investigation.
7. Notify our Insurance Company and complete an incident report if the nature of the allegations warrant this action.
8. Comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists.
9. Cooperate with any investigation of the incident by state or local authorities. In the event there is no investigation of the incident by the state or local authorities, a team will be formed to investigate the circumstances of the incident. The team should act only in consultation with our insurance company and / or attorney.
10. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their positions.
11. The Chairperson of the SPRC and/or Senior Pastor will be the only spokespersons to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect, unless he or she is alleged to be involved.