

Safe Sanctuaries Guidelines

for
Spirit of Hope UMC
Effective June 1, 2009

Overall Rationale: As Christians and United Methodists, we are concerned for the care and well being of the children and youth in our care. As a church, we sponsor family camps, youth retreats, and other events for the youth and children of Spirit of Hope. We also invite youth to become an active part of our planning and visioning through participation in all aspects of the mission and ministries of our church. It is critical that we model the best practices for the protection of our children and youth, whether on church grounds or at SOH sponsored events. In order to do so, we will operate with the following guidelines for their health and safety while participating in the life of Spirit of Hope United Methodist Church.

The goal of these guidelines is threefold: first, to prevent abuse from happening to any of the youth and children in our care; second, to prevent false allegations of abuse against individuals as well as the church; third, to enable staff and volunteers to recognize and report suspected abuse.

There is no one thing we can do to prevent the abuse of children and youth within our care. However, it is our duty to develop and maintain a multi-pronged approach that includes taking appropriate precautions, preparations, and with due diligence, the risks will be curtailed as much as possible. Therefore, to protect our children we adopt these minimum standards for our ministries with youth and children.

Training will occur on a yearly basis and as new people or volunteers are hired.

GROUP OF THREE RULE—Safety in numbers

A child or youth should never be alone with another unrelated adult, child or youth at any time for any reason. Everything should be done in groups of at least three: at least two adults and one young person, or two young people and one adult. The ideal to strive for is two unrelated adults to be with children or youth at all times.

Rationale: Should an adult desire to do harm to a child, it is much more difficult to do so with another witness present. The purpose of the second, unrelated adult is to provide a second adult who is not in a position to be intimidated by the first.

A secondary rationale for this rule is to prevent false allegations of abuse. A child or youth seeking revenge for discipline, or perhaps seeking attention, could falsely accuse an adult or even another child of abuse. With no witness, it becomes difficult to defend against such allegations.

Implications:

- A. Each room or space where children are being cared for shall have a window in the door or an outside window with open blinds and the door/s shall always remain unlocked. Sunday school classes for preschool and elementary aged children should always have two adults present. Activities should occur in open view. Children are not allowed on the playground without adult supervision, and those over the age of seven are not allowed on the equipment.

- B. After a program or Sunday school, children should not be released until the person who brought them comes to get them, unless other provisions for pick-up have been specifically made by the child's parent or legal guardian.
- C. Any activity for youth or children that takes place away from the standard meeting place shall require written permission forms that include pertinent health information in order to participate.
- D. When an adult transports a child/youth alone, the adult will record the time and mileage at the start and end of the trip.
- E. Middle school and high school youth who can understand a covenant shall sign a participation/behavioral expectation covenant that is explained to the participants of Sunday school/youth programs at the beginning of the new school year and for each event.
- F. Physical contact shall be age-appropriate and done in the presence of other adults in an open area.
- G. Counseling situations should be managed in a manner that provides privacy of conversation, and if at all possible, in visual contact with others. An office with a window into other populated areas is ideal, sitting in an outside area at the edge of the building or field is another. At the very least, a door should be left ajar where a yell or struggle could be seen or heard by others. A wise person will ask another person to stay in visual range to ensure the safety of all involved. SOH should take these issues into account when planning new buildings.
- H. During Sunday school, restroom breaks for preschoolers should be carefully supervised—i.e., one adult should stand in the door of the Butterfly room and keep an eye out until the child returns. For elementary school children, one adult should watch the hallway as children use the restroom. All adults on campus owe it to our children to keep an eye on who is going in and out of our bathrooms.
- I. During church sanctioned youth events, plans should be made for two youth of the same gender to enter the restroom at the same time. Shower times should be separate for youth and adults, with an adult available outside the restroom door to hear any disturbances. There should be at least one adult of each gender available during sleepovers, and no youth should be allowed to be alone with a person of the opposite gender.
- J. Once minors are released from Sunday school, youth group, or other church activity into the care of their parent or guardian, the parent/guardian resumes responsibility for their minor children.

BACKGROUND CHECKS

Annual background checks should be performed on all staff and volunteers that have contact with children and youth at Spirit of Hope United Methodist Church sponsored meetings and events.

Rationale: Someone who has been convicted of a sexual offense against children, youth, or adults has no place as a volunteer at church events. Sex offenders often choose churches to find their prey because church people tend to be so trusting. The very act of being asked for a background check may deter a potential abuser from volunteering, or from acting out their desires. Finally, we need to know that those who work with our children are without a recent criminal background.

Implications:

- A. An unrelated person assigned by SOH's SPRC should do these checks.
- B. Applicants will be cleared through three criminal and sex offender databases: www.nsopr.gov; <https://az.gov/sows/searchName.faces> and www.screenow.com, through our affiliation with Church Mutual.
- C. In addition, driver's license checks should be made of adults transporting children and youth on behalf of SOH to and from meetings and events.
- D. If undesirable results appear on any of these checks, staff and volunteers may be asked not to volunteer with our children and youth.
- E. These checks should be done yearly.

APPROPRIATE WRITTEN AND ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION

Written and electronic communication between adults and children/youth should be as open and public as possible.

Rationale: Private conversation between a child/youth and adult, whether written, texted, emailed, phoned, or otherwise sent could be misconstrued as an inappropriate relationship between the adult and the young person. Photographs and movies of minor children may not be posted online without written permission of the parents. Transparency is vital.

Implications:

- A. Adults needing to communicate with children or youth by phone should try to talk with the parents or guardians either at the beginning or end of the phone call.
- B. Electronic communications, such as email, should be copied to parents. A good strategy is to include several issues in a single message, copying both youth and adults in the same message.
- C. Adults should avoid private communication with individual children and youth where they cannot be observed by others (see counseling suggestions).
- D. Volunteers and staff should be aware of their own "web presence." If a child/youth/adult did an on-line search for their name would anything—written word or photo—come up that they would be embarrassed about? Are there links from pages they operate that lead to material that is inappropriate for children and youth? We ask volunteers and staff to covenant to maintain a Christian web presence.

REPORTING ABUSE—Reports of abuse are required by law

Any person who reasonably believes that a minor is or has been the victim of physical injury, abuse, child abuse, a reportable offense or neglect that appears to have been inflicted on the minor by other than accidental means, shall immediately report or cause reports to be made of this information to a peace officer or to Child Protective Services in the Department of Economic Security.

Rationale: No rationale is needed. A child who is being hurt needs the protection of caring adults. Period.

Implications:

- A. Take step to protect the alleged victim
- B. Immediately notify the adult in charge who will immediately notify the pastor.
- C. The incident must be reported to either CPS or local law enforcement. In the absence of the pastor, the person in charge must make the report.

- D. Take notes to record what was said to whom, when authorities were notified, who was involved. Document EVERYTHING.
- E. Do NOT confront the accused.
- F. Do NOT contact the family. The pastor or the investigating agency will do this.
- G. Act discreetly and maintain confidentiality of all involved. Remain unbiased, recognizing that allegations are just allegations until fully investigated.
- H. If the accused is an adult staff or volunteer, this person will be suspended from his/her position until the allegations are fully investigated and resolved.
- I. The pastor will designate a single spokesperson who will be the only person to convey information regarding the situation. The privacy and confidentiality of all the parties should be protected and information provided only as necessary.
- J. In the event of a case involving clergy, follow the above guidelines and procedures outlined in the current Journal of the Desert Southwest Conference of the United Methodist Church under the title “Policies and Procedures for Dealing with Clergy Sexual Misconduct.” The most current copy is available in the church office. For further help call the Conference office and speak with the District Superintendent.
- K. Pray for the child/youth and his/her family and the accused. Maintain an attitude of prayer throughout the process.

IN CASE OF EMERGENCY or MEDICAL TREATMENT

- A. A basic first aid kit is available in the office—it’s in a metal box under the administrative assistance’s desk.
- B. Minor cuts, scrapes, burns, etc, that are treated by the adult volunteer should be recorded on an Incident Report form (kept in the first aid kit). This form will be signed by the parent/guardian and filed in the office. The pastor will receive a copy.
- C. In case of serious injury, one of the adults will stay with the minor and administer first aid while the other adult will call 911 and locate the parent/guardian.
- D. After the emergency is addressed, the incident will be documented by the adults and a copy will be given to the parent/guardian. The church copy will be signed by the parent/guardian and filed. The pastor will receive a copy.
- E. FIRE EMERGENCY—In case of a fire, all children/youth will be evacuated by the adult volunteers. If the fire is small and it is safe to do so, the other volunteer can attempt to extinguish the fire with a fire extinguisher. If not, make sure BOTH buildings are evacuated and dial 911.

This policy is compiled from the conference recommended safe sanctuaries policy as well as policies developed by other churches and has been adapted to the needs of Spirit of Hope United Methodist Church.

Arizona law particularly protects “vulnerable” adults. An adult is deemed vulnerable when he or she “is unable to protect himself/herself from abuse, neglect, or exploitation by others because of a physical or mental impairment---Arizona Revised Statutes section 46-451(A)(10)