

Powhatan United Methodist Church

CHILDREN AND YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY

January 12, 2016

Purpose:

- To promote a caring and secure environment for children and youth in all phases and activities at or sponsored by Powhatan United Methodist Church (PUMC).
- To provide educational programs and a safe environment for all workers of children and youth of programs at or sponsored by Powhatan United Methodist Church.
- To establish guidelines for compliance with Virginia State Law on child abuse and Virginia United Methodist Conference Child/Youth Protection Guidelines.

Biblical Foundation:

Powhatan United Methodist Church seeks to express God's love of children and youth to provide for their personal wholeness. This caring community seeks to prevent abuse of any form to children and youth and to be in ministry to families where abuse may occur. The Bible is foundational to our understanding upon which all policies, procedures, and ministries must stand. Jesus teaches us that children have a special place in the Kingdom of God. Jesus said: "Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God." Mark 10:14

Proverbs 22:6 says to "bring the child up in the way he/she should be." The way that Jesus teaches is with compassion and kindness, respectful of others, loving God and our neighbors. Our goal in response to Biblical mandate is to maintain a safe, secure, and loving place where children may grow and learn from positive behavior/role models. Powhatan United Methodist Church must be a place where caregivers, teachers, and leaders (both paid and volunteer) minister appropriately to our children and youth.

Background:

Abuse can be defined as an act committed by a parent, caregiver, or person in a position of trust (even though he/she may not care for the child on a daily basis) which is not accidental and which harms or threatens to harm a child's physical or mental health or welfare.

Child abuse can happen anywhere and churches are not exempt. Recent publicity on child and youth abuse in churches and throughout society has led to Virginia State Law and Virginia Methodist Conference guidelines to reduce the risk of abuse and facilitate the prompt reporting and professional investigation of alleged abuse. This policy is patterned to comply with the law and the Conference Guidelines and to help Powhatan United Methodist Church provide a safe and nurturing environment for all activities conducted at or sponsored by Powhatan United Methodist Church.

Applicability:

This policy applies to all users of Powhatan United Methodist Church facilities and to church-sponsored activities. This includes, but is not limited to: Sunday School, Youth Programs, Day School, Scouts, Choirs, Nursery, Children's Church, and other Child Care.

Basic Concepts:

Powhatan United Methodist Church children/youth protection program is based on continued proactive efforts in four areas:

1. Adult supervision utilizing two unrelated adults together whenever possible
2. Screening and selection of staff and volunteer workers
3. Providing training in detecting, reporting, responding to potential abuse, and reducing the risk/opportunity for child abuse
4. Documenting and reporting suspected abuse as required by Virginia Law and the Virginia Conference (UMC) Policy. State laws, symptoms of abuse, and reporting requirements are cited later in this policy.

ADULT SUPERVISION:

Two adults must be present at all church sponsored activities, or another adult actively monitoring the hall, on or off church premises, involving children or youth from the beginning to the end of the activities. All activity sponsors must plan adult leadership so as to avoid a single adult being alone with a child or youth or a class of children or youth. In the event of one adult within a classroom or activity, doors must remain open and there would be an adult monitoring the hallways.

Activities involving youth or children must be open to random observation by other adult leadership or parents. Doors without windows must be left open. Doors with windows may be closed but windows must be uncovered.

If an activity with children or youth involves an overnight stay, two or more adult leaders must be present and should try to include at least two males and two females if the group is mixed gender.

Parental Permission Exception: Church staff or volunteer workers must obtain the written consent of the children or youth's parent/guardian before going out alone with that child or spending time with the child in an unsupervised situation. An appropriate church leader must be notified of such meetings in advance.

TRANSPORTATION:

- When caravanning to an activity, at least two (2) cars must travel together. When possible, a communication device should be in each vehicle; vehicles must stay within each other's sight.
- When a single adult is transporting a child home, the adult must contact the parent before leaving for the destination.

SCREENING SELECTION:

Paid and Volunteer Workers: The first year of service, each employed or volunteer children's teacher, child care worker, youth worker, or chaperone will be asked to sign a screening form which includes: name, address, telephone number, prior church membership, previous church or non-church work involving children or youth, a current driver's license or social security number, a photo, any criminal convictions, two personal references who can attest to the applicant's suitability for work with children, and a statement indicating that he/she has no founded complaints or convictions of child abuse nor has had such complaints expunged. Normally volunteers who work with children or youth should be attending church for at least six (6) months. New volunteers and paid staff should be paired with more experienced individuals for their first six (6) months.

Automatic Exclusion: Anyone who has had a founded complaint for child abuse, as well as anyone refusing to sign the form, will not be permitted to work with children.

Paid Staff Position: In addition to signing the screening form applicants for paid positions will undergo a Child Protective Services check and a Virginia Police Criminal background check.

TRAINING:

All paid and volunteer child care workers, children's Sunday School teachers, youth workers, youth teachers, chaperones, and anyone else working with children and youth will be required to read the church's Children and Youth Protection Policy and sign a form indicating that they have read, understand, and agree to abide by the policy.

During the course of the first year of service, children's teachers, youth teachers, and volunteer workers who have ongoing contact with children will be required to attend one training session related to the church's Children and Youth Protection Policy. These training sessions will be conducted by the staff or others as designated by the staff and will be held at various times throughout the year. All teachers and workers will be provided with information and encouraged to attend sessions for update/refresher each year.

The leaders of outside churches or other groups of children or youth using Powhatan United Methodist Church facilities or property will be required to read this policy and sign an acknowledgment form agreeing to follow the guidelines.

REPORTING:

State Law governs reporting on suspected abuse directly to Child Protective Services and by our Virginia Conference policy on also reporting (confidentially) directly to the District Superintendent. Everyone must report any known or reasonably suspected child abuse immediately. Powhatan United Methodist Church personnel will follow these procedures (from the Virginia Conference Child/Youth Protection Guidelines):

1. Treat any allegation of child abuse seriously; do not ignore the issues in the hope that they will go away.
2. Notify the Pastor.
 - a. Call the Richmond District Superintendent immediately.
 - b. Report the allegation to the church insurance carrier immediately upon notifying the District Superintendent. (Consult your church's legal counsel if desired.)
 - c. Notify the victim's parents/guardians if it is not known that they have previous knowledge of the alleged incident or are not suspected themselves.
 - d. Any worker accused of abuse must report the incident to his/her supervisor immediately.
3. Report the allegation to the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) as required by state law. If you are uncertain about what has happened or how to proceed, you may call anonymously. VDSS will help you determine next steps and/or will conduct an investigation if warranted.
4. Document all procedures observed in handling the allegation.

PASTOR FOLLOW-UP RESPONSE:

1. Pray for the church and all persons affected by the allegation.
2. Do not confront the accused with the allegation. If the accused has assigned church duties with children or youth, that person must be relieved temporarily of his/her duties until the investigation is concluded. If the person is a paid employee, the question of continuing or suspending compensation during the investigation must be addressed.
3. Extend whatever pastoral care and resources are necessary, but under no circumstances must the local pastor investigate the allegation. In providing pastoral care to the alleged victim and the alleged victim's family or to the accused or the family of the accused, the pastor must, under no circumstances, be drawn into a discussion of the truth or falsity of the allegation. Do not assign blame or take any steps that involve establishing or refuting the allegation.
4. It is appropriate to show care and comfort for the alleged victim. In fact, this must be the pastoral objective from the moment the allegation is received or otherwise made known.
5. Observe confidentiality for both the alleged victim and the accused until the investigation is complete.

What is considered child abuse?

Under Virginia Law Section 63.1 – 248.2, an abused child is defined as one who is less than eighteen years of age, whose parents or other persons responsible for his/her care creates or inflicts, or threatens to create or inflict, or allows to be created or inflicted upon such a child a **physical or mental injury** by other than accidental means, or creates substantial risk of death or

disfigurement, or impairment of bodily functions. This includes the following: failure to provide care necessary for health, abandonment, commits or allows sexual exploitation, is and may be the result of actions or omissions to act (e.g. lack of care for a child).

Section 63.1 – 248.3, Virginia Revised Code, states that “Any person licensed to practice medicine or any of the healing arts, any hospital resident or intern, any person employed in the nursing profession, any persons employed as a social worker, any probation officer, any teacher or other person employed in a public or private school, kindergarten, or nursery school, any person providing full-time or part-time child care for pay on a regular planned basis . . . and **any person associated with or employed by any private organization responsible for the care, custody or control of children** who has reason to suspect that a child is abused or neglected, must report the matter immediately . . . to the local department of the county or city wherein the child resides or wherein the abuse or neglect is believed to have occurred or to the Department of Social Services’ toll free child abuse and neglect hotline.” (Emphasis added)

Types of Child Abuse:

A. Definition

Child Abuse refers to an act committed by a parent, care-giver or person in a position of trust (even though he/she may not care for the child on a daily basis) which is not accidental and which harms or threatens to harm a child’s physical or mental health or welfare. The following definitions and explanations in this section are from the Virginia Department of Social Services.

B. Types of Abuse

- **Physical Abuse:** A physical injury, threat of injury or creation of a real and significant danger or substantial risk of death, disfigurement or impairment of bodily functions. Such injury, regardless of intent, is inflicted or allowed to be inflicted by non-accidental means. Examples: asphyxiation, bone fracture, brain damage skull fracture, subdural hematoma, burns, scalding, cuts, bruises, welts, abrasions, internal injuries, poisoning, sprains, dislocations, gunshot, stabbing wounds.
- **Physical Neglect:** The failure to provide food, clothing, shelter, or supervision for a child if the child’s health or safety is endangered. Physical neglect may include multiple occurrences or a one-time critical or severe event that results in a threat to health or safety, such as a toddler left alone. Other types of neglect include abandonment, inadequate supervision, inadequate shelter, inadequate personal hygiene, inadequate food and malnutrition.
- **Sexual Abuse:** Sexual abuse includes any act defined in the code of Virginia that is committed or allowed to be committed, upon a child by his/her parent or other persons responsible for the child’s care. Examples of such abuse are sexual exploitation, sexual molestation, and intercourse/sodomy. Non-touching abuse includes verbal comments, pornography, obscene phone calls, exhibitionism, forcing or allowing a child to witness sexual activity.
- **Mental Abuse/Neglect:** A pattern of acts or omissions by the caretaker, which results in harm to a child’s psychological or emotional health or development.

- Bizarre Discipline: Any actions in which the caretaker uses eccentric, irrational, or grossly inappropriate procedures or devices to modify the child's behavior.

Policy Review:

This policy will be reviewed annually and a verification follow-up report will be made each year at Charge Conference to insure the integrity of the policy and procedures. Implementation is the responsibility of all church staff and volunteers. The Pastor and Children's Director, Youth Director, and Pre-school Director will monitor required training and documentation. The Child Protection Policy is maintained by SPRC. This policy is on file and available in the church office upon request.

Return to:

***Powhatan United Methodist Church
2253 Rosson Rd
Powhatan, Virginia 23139
Attention: Pastor***

Please answer the following questions. Sign, date, and return to indicate that you have read, understood, and agree to abide by the CHILDREN AND YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY of POWHATAN UNITED METHODIST CHURCH.

Name: _____

Present Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Phone Number: _____

Name(s) of Church(es) you have attended regularly during the last five years:

List all previous church and non-church work involving children or youth (name and addresses):

List your current driver's license number. If you do not have a driver's license, list your social security number. _____

List two personal references (not former employees or relatives). List name and phone number.

1.

2.

A photo may be taken for church records.

I have read and understand the policy and agree to abide by it. I have no founded complaints or criminal convictions for child abuse or expungements of such complaints. I authorize and release any references listed to give you any information (including opinions) that they may have regarding my work with children or youth. I also authorize a background check.

Signature: _____ Date: _____