

Little River United Methodist Church
Christian Education Committee
Safe Sanctuaries Guidelines
For Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults

As Christians, we are called to live according to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus plainly taught that children were to be included and provided for within the community of faith. Throughout the history of the Christian church, children have been included in the worship and ministry of the community of faith. Today, the church may be the only place where some children find the unconditional love and care they so desperately need to grow, to thrive and to become faithful people. As Christians, we must take our responsibilities to our children, youth and vulnerable adults very seriously, always attending to their spiritual growth and nurturing. We fail in our responsibilities if we neglect to take adequate precautions against abuse in our churches. It is unlikely that we can completely prevent abuse in all circumstances. Yet, it is possible for us to greatly reduce the risk by following thorough and practical guidelines for prevention.

It is our belief that most adults, and certainly those Christian adults involved in the work of the church are trustworthy and have the best interest of our children, youth and vulnerable adults in their hearts. We do not wish to create an environment of suspicion or unfair judging. We do want the children, youth and vulnerable adults at Little River United Methodist Church to be cared for in a loving Christian atmosphere where their hands are held for support, hugs are given to love, and words are expressed to encourage everyone in their spiritual growth as Disciples of Christ.

Abuse may include physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, sexual abuse and ritual abuse. Because our church is a community of faith, a safe haven and sanctuary where children, youth and vulnerable adults can be confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal, the following guidelines are adopted in the hope that we will prevent any type of abuse at Little River United Methodist Church.

As a Christian Community of faith and a member of the South Carolina United Methodist Conference, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of our children, youth, vulnerable adults as well as all workers with children, youth and vulnerable adults. We pledge to follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers

Volunteer and paid workers:

1. We will seek volunteers to work with children and youth through advertising in the church bulletin and newsletter but the preferred manner would be to talk individually to people who have identified an interest and who have shown their gifts and abilities to work well with children and youth. We will follow the same procedures in recruiting workers with vulnerable adults.
2. Volunteers and paid workers who accept the challenge to work with children, youth and vulnerable adults will be given a copy of our Safe Sanctuaries Guidelines. Every applicant (paid and volunteer) must sign a copy of the Safe

- Sanctuary Guidelines which will be kept on file. The applicant/ employee/volunteer will be given a copy of the guidelines after they have signed it acknowledging they have read it completely, understand the guidelines and will follow the same. If the applicant needs further clarification, it will be provided by the Program Staff and/or the Pastor.
3. Should the applicant/employee/volunteer accept this responsibility to work with children, youth and vulnerable adults, a criminal background check will be done. Workers must sign consent to criminal background check forms. The background checks will be done through SLED CATCH and will be done by the Director of Education. Every worker may choose to have a copy of the background check. The Background Checks will be filed in the Church Secretary's Office. The background checks will be paid for by the church and will be renewed every two years. Should the background check show any information that an applicant has been convicted of child abuse, molestation, incest or other crime against a child, youth or vulnerable adult, that applicant will be rejected as a worker. Other arrests and information indicating charges filed against an applicant with conviction will be investigated by the Program Staff and Pastor and decisions made as to whether or not that person can continue working with children, youth or vulnerable adults..
 4. Middle High and High School youth will be allowed to work with children but only under the supervision of an adult over 21 years of age. Middle School students who work with children will be encouraged to take a Baby Sitting Course. No Middle or High school student may be the only leader in a classroom. Background checks cannot be required for Middle and High School Youth.
 5. Two Adult Rules: Our goal is to provide two adults with children and youth groups at all times for any church program or activity including Sunday School hour. We will try to have two unrelated family members as adult leaders. When two adults are not present, adult leaders are asked to keep the room door open if the room does not have a door window allowing the room to be visualized from the outside.
 6. Three Month Rule: Demonstration of an active relationship with a local church of at least three months will be required before being allowed to be in a "supervisory" role with children, youth and vulnerable adults. Volunteers may participate as an "assistant" only under the supervision of an approved supervisor.
 7. First Aid/CPR Training. We will offer CPR and First Aid training annually. It is our goal to train at least one adult for every class.
 8. Windows in Classroom Doors: Our goal is to have a window in every classroom door where children and youth meet. As of October 10, 2008 every child/youth room meets this requirement.
 9. Lights should be left on during class time unless you are viewing a movie. Children/Youth are not be left alone while watching a movie. Two qualified leaders should always be with the group. Should the need arise for one adult to leave the room the door will be left open to the classroom.
 10. Open Door Counseling: When counseling children or youth, the door should remain open at all times unless two adults are present.

11. Event Notice: Advance notice and full information of an event should be provided to parents. Parents will always be asked to give written permission for their child to participate in these events.
12. Event Attendance for Children and Youth Fellowship: A record should be kept of every event including a list of children and youth participating and a list of leaders/volunteers.
13. Overnight Trips: A statement regarding sleeping arrangements of adults and youth during an overnight trip will be given to the program director prior to the event.
14. Bathroom: When an adult accompanies a child under 5 years old to the bathroom, the adult should leave the door slightly ajar and remain just outside the door. If the child needs the adult in the bathroom, leave the door open at all times. When an older child goes to the bathroom, a teacher should watch from the hallway to make sure the child goes into the bathroom and comes out of the bathroom and back to class safely. No child should be allowed to leave the classroom alone.
15. Training: We will seek to have a training event annually to educate workers on guidelines, recognizing and reporting abuse and procedures to follow.
16. Equipment and Supervision: The staff will assure the safety of equipment and facilities. Teachers/workers will report any safety issues to the Director of Education, the Director of Children and Youth Ministries or the Board of Trustees in writing.
17. Insurance: The Board of Trustees will provide adequate insurance coverage for the scope of children and youth ministries at Little River United Methodist Church.

NURSERY:

1. There should always be two adult workers in the nursery.
2. An information card is to be completed on each child who is left in the nursery
3. The parents/caregivers/grandparents must sign the child in and sign the child out **(no exceptions)**
4. When the Check-Point system is completely installed and working, every child from Nursery through Elementary should be checked in and out at each event.
5. A child should not be released to an older sibling or someone who has not been approved by the parents. In the event that this is not possible, the volunteer should seek the assistance of the Director of Education or the Director of Children and Youth Ministries.
6. Nursery workers should note any problems or concerns that may occur while a child is under their care and report to the parents when the child is picked up.
7. The Nursery Workers should never leave the children alone in the room for any reason while the children are under their care and supervision. They should always use the Walkie Talkie to call for assistance.
8. Walkie Talkies should be used for the purpose of notifying one of the ushers if there is a problem in the nursery. One of the nursery workers is responsible for seeing that the head usher for each service has one of the Walkie Talkies.

9. The Nursery Workers should use calm, loving voices at all times and never yell or scream at the children.
10. Nursery Workers are never to use any kind of physical spanking as a form of punishment for a child
11. Nursery Workers will report any concerns regarding child abuse to the Director of Education or the Pastor
12. No adults other than parent/grandparent/legal guardian of a child/or family relative should be in the nursery during the time that a child is under our care. Other adult volunteer workers in the nursery must undergo a criminal background check.

Reporting allegations of abuse:

1. The witness who suspects or has seen any type of abuse must notify the person in charge of the program, i.e. Sunday School – notify Director of Education; children and youth fellowships – notify the Director of Children and Youth Ministries
2. The witness must fill out the appropriate Incident Report (attached) and give to the Program Director
3. The Program Director will notify the Pastor
4. The Program Director and the Pastor will notify the parent(s)/caregivers of the victim
5. All reporting of alleged incidents or actual incidents of child or elder abuse must strictly follow South Carolina law.

Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse Within the Church:

1. When an accusation has been made the person accused should be treated with dignity and respect but immediately removed from further involvement with children and youth until the investigation has been completed.
2. The parents of the victim will be notified of the allegation by Program Staff and/or the Pastor
3. The victim will be placed in the care of the program director or another qualified adult (someone who has a clear criminal background check) and kept safe until the parent(s) arrive. The safety of the victim will be the church's primary concern.
4. The Program Director will notify the Pastor immediately and the Pastor will notify proper law enforcement services if necessary
5. The pastor will notify the annual conference authorities beginning with the District Superintendent
6. The pastor will notify the church's attorney and Insurance Company if necessary
7. The Program Director will keep a written record of the steps taken by the church in response and give to the Pastor
8. All documents and forms are confidential and will be kept in a safe, locked file cabinet
9. The Pastor will be the designated spokesperson to make any necessary statements or responses to the news media.

10. The Pastor will prepare a brief and honest statement that can be made to the congregation without giving unnecessary details, placing blame, interfering with the victim's privacy or violating any confidentiality concerns
11. All Church Staff are to be prepared to cooperate fully with the investigation conducted by law enforcement services

Responding to Suspicion of Child Abuse Outside the Church:

1. If someone in the church **knows** that abuse is occurring, that person should report this immediately to all appropriate state authorities.
2. If someone suspects abuse, no action should be taken until we **know** that abuse is occurring to guard ourselves against legal action based on our leveling false accusations.
3. In cases of suspicion of child abuse we will move cautiously and not make accusations until we are positively sure of abuse.

Severe Weather/Disaster Response Plan: This is to be studied and guidelines set in the near future.

Revised October 10, 2008