

Child/Youth Protection Policy

Child Abuse Prevention Policy for First United Methodist Church Guntersville, Alabama

PURPOSE: It is the purpose and intent of First United Methodist Church of Guntersville, Alabama to provide a safe, secure environment to teach and care for the children and students of our faith family.

GOAL: Our goal is to protect children from sexual abuse, child molestation or any type of inappropriate sexual behavior by employees or volunteers in this church and to protect employees and volunteers from false accusations.

DEFINITION OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE: The National Resource Center on Child Sexual Abuse defines child sexual abuse as “any sexual activity with a child, whether in the home by a caretaker, in a day-care situation, in any organized ministry, whether at the main facility (church) or away, 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.

Child sexual abuse can be violent or non-violent. It is criminal behavior that involves children in sexual behavior. Child sexual abuse can involve fondling; penetration of the oral, genital, and anal areas; intercourse; and forcible rape. Other forms of abuse can include verbal comments, any exposure to pornographic materials, inappropriate internet activity, obscene phone calls, exhibitionism, or allowing children to witness sexual activity.

DEFINITION OF A MINOR: A minor is any individual under the age of 19 years.

The policy and procedure set forth below will apply to all people who give supervision or have custody of minors or who have opportunity to have contact with minors in church facilities or church sponsored activities whether clergy, paid staff, or volunteer.

This policy will address four (4) areas that are critical for the protection of the children, our employees and our church: **selection process, protection policy, reporting procedures, and responses to allegations.**

I. SELECTION PROCESS

A. **Employee** – anyone who is paid by the church on a full-time or part-time basis, whether or not they work directly with preschoolers, children and students

Current employee

- Complete a confidential application form
- Complete a consent to release confidential information
- Recommendation Report completed by supervising staff member
- Criminal records check
- DHR records check authorization form. Received letter from State of Alabama DHR stating “meets the suitability” criteria under State statute
- Received appropriate clearances of all checks to work with minors

New employee (effective January 2005)

- Complete a confidential application form
- Complete a consent to release confidential information
- Criminal records check
- DHR records check authorization form
- Interview by appropriate staff member
- References checked and verified
- Received letter from State of Alabama DHR stating “meets the suitability” criteria under State statute
- Received appropriate clearances on all checks to work with minors

All records, forms and reports will become a part of the employee’s confidential personnel file.

B. **Volunteer** – anyone who is not paid by the church on a full-time or part-time basis, and is serving in any position involving the supervision or custody of minors. Examples: Nursery, childcare, preschool, grade school, middle school, high school, and college workers, bus drivers, teachers, chaperones, others as designated by the Church Administrator.

Current volunteer

- Complete a confidential application form
- Complete a consent to release confidential information
- DHR records check
- Possible criminal records check*
- Received letter from State of Alabama DHR stating “meets the suitability” criteria under State statute
- Received appropriate clearances on all checks to work with minors

New Volunteer (effective January 2005)

- Complete a confidential application form
- Complete a consent to release confidential information
- Interview by appropriate staff member
- References checked and verified
- DHR records check
- Possible criminal records check*
- Received letter from State of Alabama DHR stating “meets the suitability” criteria under State statute
- Received appropriate clearances on all checks to work with minors

*Possible criminal records checks for volunteers will be limited to any criminal activity involving the following: (1) a minor; (2) child molestation, (3) any type of sexual offense; (4) any type of pornographic or obscene material; (5) any type of physical violence; and (6) suspected child abuse.

In addition to the above requirements, a volunteer must be a member of Guntersville First United Methodist Church, or regular attendee, for at least six (6) months. A volunteer who does not meet these membership requirements may serve only upon approval of the appropriate age-group minister.

C. **Minors** – In addition to the above requirements a minor who is an employee or volunteer must also submit a separate certification from his or her parent or guardian that the parent or guardian “knows no reason why the minor should not be allowed to work directly or indirectly with other minors.” Minors should NEVER be allowed to supervise children without constant adult supervision.

II. PROTECTION POLICY

A. Two Adults

We will implement prudent, operational procedures in all programs and events. We will strive to uphold the 2 adult rule, but when this is not feasible, we will uphold the open door policy, with periodical check-ins from other adults. No supervisor will be alone with a child or youth at a church-sponsored event. No event/ministry will take place with only one adult present. A husband and wife working the same room will typically be considered as one adult for purposes of this policy.

B. View Windows/Open Doors

Reasonable effort will be made to place preschoolers, children and students in rooms with view windows or open doors for all teaching/learning activities.

C. Over-Night Activities

All Employees and Volunteers will be required to comply with all of the Child/Youth Protection Policies during

Guntersville First United Methodist Church's sponsored over-night activities.

D. Within Town Activities

All Employees and Volunteers will be required to comply with all of the Child/Youth Protection Policies during Guntersville First United Methodist Church's sponsored activities within town activities.

E. Out-of-Town Activities

All participants should have written parental consent and a notarized medical release form. Consent forms may be completed for a one-year period and should be renewed annually. All consent forms will be considered valid until renewed. All Employees and Volunteers shall be required to comply with all of Guntersville First United Methodist Church's policies including, but not limited to, those outlined in Child/Youth Protection policies during Guntersville First United Methodist Church's sponsored out-of-town activities.

F. Weekday Programs

Due to the professional relationship of the teacher and student, parents understand that only one teacher may be present in certain learning or artistic performance programs. All professional teachers shall complete the "employee" selection process, even if they are volunteers.

III. REPORTING PROCEDURES

Observed or reported child sexual abuse or child molestation should be reported immediately to the appropriate age group minister or the Church Administrator or the Minister of Children. Reporting abuse can precipitate severe consequences to a family, so it should never be done casually or thoughtlessly, and certainly not for malicious purposes. At the same time, failing to report abuse can have severe consequences to a child at risk. Therefore, if you have reasonable cause to suspect abuse, you should talk with an appropriate person to see what steps could and should be taken to protect the child and help the family. When time and circumstances permit, the report should first be made to the appropriate age-group minister, who will then proceed with the correct and thorough process.

IV. RESPONSES TO ALLEGATIONS

A. All allegations will be taken seriously and church staff will take appropriate action in accordance with the laws of the State of Alabama, insurance policy requirement, and based upon advice of legal counsel.

B. The official spokesperson for the church in any of these matters will be the Pastor or his appointee. No other staff members or church members shall speak to the media in an official capacity.

C. The church staff will document (in writing, with date and signature) all efforts in the handling of any incident.

D. The church staff will not deny, minimize, or blame any individual involved in allegations. Guntersville First United Methodist Church's staff will minister to all involved, as well as cooperate with authorities.

IV. AMENDMENT OF POLICY

The Board of Administration may amend these policies upon 30 days notice to the Church.

VII. EFFECTIVE DATE

January 1, 2005

