

CROZET UNITED METHODIST CHURCH (CUMC) CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

1. PURPOSE

- a. To help CUMC provide a caring and secure environment for children and youth in all phases of church life.
- b. To ensure that volunteers and paid staff desiring to work with children and youth within the church are properly screened, trained and interested in promoting the best interest of the child.
- c. To help CUMC reduce its legal risk and liability exposure.

2. BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

And they were bringing children to him, that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it he was indignant, and said to them, "Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying hands upon them. (Mark 10:13-16 NRSV)

Jesus teaches us that children have the right and the keys to the kingdom of God. Our goal, then, is to maintain a safe, secure and loving place for children to grow; a place where caregivers, teachers and leaders (both paid and volunteer) minister appropriately to their needs. CUMC seeks to prevent any form of child abuse to our children and youth, and be in ministry to families where abuse or neglect may occur.

3. VIRGINIA'S CHILD ABUSE LAW

Under section 63.1-248.2 of the Code of Virginia, an abused child is one that is under 18 years of age who is without parental care or guardianship caused by the unreasonable absence or the mental or physical incapacity of the child's parent, guardian, legal custodian or other person standing in loco parentis; or whose parents or any person responsible for his or her care: a. causes or threatens to cause a non-accidental physical or mental injury; b. causes a high-risk of death, disfigurement, or impairment of bodily or mental function; c. neglects or refuses to provide adequate supervision in relation to a child's age and level of development; d. abandons the child; or e. commits or allows to be committed any illegal sexual act upon a child, including incest, rape, indecent exposure, prostitution, or allows a child to be used in any sexually explicit visual material. Section 63.1-248.3 of the Code of Virginia states " 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 person 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, shall report the matter immediately to the local Department of Social Services 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 (1-800-552-7096).” Additionally, although not required by law, anyone else who knows or reasonably suspects child abuse should report such suspected abuse immediately. Such a report is held confidential, and Section 63.1-248.5 of the Code of Virginia states that any person making a report/complaint of child abuse or neglect shall be immune from civil or criminal liability unless that person acted in bad faith or with malicious intent.

4. TYPES OF CHILD ABUSE

Child abuse refers to an act committed by a parent, caregiver or person in a position of trust, 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 are from the Virginia Department of Social Services:

a. PHYSICAL ABUSE

A physical injury, threat of injury, or creation of a real and significant danger of substantial risk of death, disfigurement or impairment of bodily functions. Such injury or threat of injury, regardless of intent, is inflicted or allowed to be inflicted by non-accidental means (e.g. skull fracture, scalding, bruises, etc.).

b. 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 threat to health or safety, such as a toddler left alone. Other types of neglect include abandonment, inadequate personal hygiene, malnutrition, inadequate clothing, supervision, shelter or food.

c. 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 person responsible for the child’s care. Examples include sexual exploitation, sexual molestation, intercourse/sodomy, and other sexual abuse.

d. MEDICAL NEGLECT

Refusal or failure by a caretaker to obtain and/or follow through with a complete regimen of medical, mental or dental care for a condition, which, if untreated, could result in illness or developmental delays.

e. FAILURE TO THRIVE

A syndrome of infancy or early childhood that is characterized by growth failure, signs of severe malnutrition, and variable degrees of developmental retardation. Children are considered to be in this category only when diagnosed by a physician and it is caused by non-organic factors.

f. MENTAL ABUSE/NEGLECT

A pattern of acts or omissions by the caretaker that result in harm to a child's psychological or emotional health or development.

g. EDUCATIONAL NEGLECT

The child's caretaker is directly responsible for the failure of the child to attend school or an alternative program of study such as home schooling.

h. BIZARRE DISCIPLINE

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

i. RITUAL ABUSE

When a child is violated in a physical, sexual, or emotional way by an abuser who may be involved in occult activity. It involves an intentional and stylized form of child abuse which may include cruel treatment of animals or repeated threats of harm to the child, other persons, or animals.

5. POLICIES FOR REDUCING THE RISK OF CHILD ABUSE

In an effort to create the safest possible environment within CUMC, the following prevention measures will be used:

a. SCREENING OF VOLUNTEERS AND STAFF

- All volunteers serving in a leadership capacity to children or youth under the age of 18 must be members or active in CUMC for at least 6 months.
 - Exceptions:
 1. This requirement may be waived if a person transfers from another church AND provides references to the Pastor of Family Ministries. The verification of these references must be documented before allowing the person to begin to work independently with children or youth at CUMC.
 2. Kingswood Christian Preschool follows the Virginia Religiously Exempt Child Day Center Policy – Virginia Department of Social Services
- All volunteers and paid staff serving in a leadership capacity to children or youth under the age of 18 will be required to complete a criminal background check.

- No one who has had a formal child abuse accusation or conviction, or who refuses to complete the screening form will be permitted to work with CUMC's children or youth. Note all persons are welcome to attend CUMC. Those with former child abuse accusations or convictions will not be allowed in the areas of the church designated for children and youth for any reason. In addition, this person will be asked to refrain from child and youth-centered activities such as VBS, Easter Egg Hunt, Sunday School, etc.

b. TRAINING OF VOLUNTEERS AND STAFF

All volunteers and paid staff serving in a leadership capacity to children or youth under the age of 18 will be asked to read the CUMC Child Protection Policy and sign a Statement of Understanding and Intent Regarding CUMC Child Protection Policy (located in Appendix A of this document).

All volunteers and paid staff serving in a leadership capacity to children or youth under the age of 18 will be required to participate in a Child Protection Training session. This training could be provided either by the Conference, the District, the Pastor or trained designee. Whenever possible this training should take place before volunteers and staff assume their positions. It is required that this training take place within 3 months of assuming a volunteer or staff position.

Volunteers and paid staff must repeat Child Protection Training a minimum of every 3 years. The Pastor of Family Ministries will ensure that Child Protection Training opportunities are made available to new volunteers and paid staff and that adequate training records are maintained.

All volunteers and paid staff serving in a leadership capacity to children or youth under the age of 18 will be oriented or trained as necessary by another teacher or leader in the church to fulfill their job description. The content of this training will depend on the position sought, previous experience, etc.

c. EMPOWERING PARENTS, CHILDREN AND YOUTH

CUMC recognizes that by empowering parents, children and youth with information, that the risk of child abuse can be diminished. Parents are reminded to:

- escort their children to the restrooms during services. Remember the building is open much of the time and predators target churches and count on parents feeling relaxed in this environment.
- supervise their children during church socials, or at other times when children have not specifically been left in the care of a volunteer or paid staff member.
- disallow children from going to remote areas, parking lots, etc., alone during church services.

- talk to your children and youth about measures the child can take to stay out of high-risk situations.
- question leaders regarding amount of supervision present at a given activity, particularly off-ground, or overnight activities.
- Report situations where they have been made to feel unwelcome by volunteers or leaders at any given activity involving children or youth. Remember there is an Open Door Rule being observed at CUMC.

d. TWO-ADULT RULE

Whenever possible, staff and volunteers will be assigned in teams of two or more. This rule will apply to all classes and activities involving children and youth under 18. If the situation is deemed low risk (group of children as opposed to one-on-one, daylight as opposed to night, on-grounds as opposed to off- grounds) then it is permissible to have 1 adult, however in these instances, where 1 adult is present, it is critical that the Open Door Rule and/or the Floater/Hall Monitor Rule are fully implemented. This is intended to be the exception rather than the rule. There should never be only one youth or child alone with one adult.

e. OPEN VISIBILITY RULE

Open visibility should be maintained for all activities involving children and youth. This means that activities should take place in full view of routine pedestrian traffic through the building through either glass window panels or through open doors. Of note, when adults are required to assist toddlers in the restrooms, the door of the restroom should remain open at all times.

f. FLOATER/HALL MONITORS RULE

Whenever possible during scheduled activities involving children or youth, a floater/ hall monitor will be assigned to walk the halls of the building where classes are taking place and to check all bathrooms at least 1 time during the course of the session.

g. PARENTAL CONSENT FOR ALL OFF-GROUND ACTIVITIES

All off-ground activities involving children and/or youth require written parental consent.

h. PRE-NOTIFICATION OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE BOARD FOR ALL OFF-GROUND ACTIVITIES

The Administrative Board will be informed of all off-site activities in writing before they occur.

i. OPEN CLASSROOM RULE

Classrooms may be visited at any time without prior notice by church staff, parents or other church volunteers.

j. REGISTRATION FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Registration forms must be completed by parents or legal guardians of children ages 2 years through 5th grade attending Christian Education Activities. Note a separate registration form will be required for Sunday School and Vacation Bible School. These forms should list allergies, contact information, medical alerts and state persons that may pick up the child.

H. PARENT/GUARDIAN DROP OFF AND PICK UP POLICY

Parents/guardians or designees are expected to bring children ages 2 years to 5th grade to the appropriate classrooms. Parents/guardians or someone designated by written parental/guardian permission must pick-up children ages 2 years to 5th grade from activities. Children will not be released to anyone who is not listed on the registration form completed by the parent or guardian as someone who may pick up the child.

I. OFF CAMPUS CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

The middle and high school classes may meet at the local coffee shop to conduct the weekly Sunday School class.

J. SOCIAL MEDIA

Leaders in ministry with people over the age of 13 (the age when social media sites permit young people to join) may find themselves invited to be “friends,” “follow” or otherwise be connected through social media. In many ways, these connections can enhance relational ministry and allow leaders to be a part of a person’s life in a unique way. However, leaders need to set up appropriate privacy barriers and boundaries for themselves.

6. BEHAVIORIAL EXPECTATIONS OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

The following expectations apply to all children and youth participating in church-sponsored activities or for children using the church or church property (including vehicles) for any reason. It is expected that children and youth will:

- Treat all people with respect.
- Accept the authority of teachers, leaders, team leaders and pastors.
- Listen when teachers/leaders are talking.
- Settle disagreements quickly, peacefully and fairly. Practice forgiveness.
- Treat church property, equipment, and supplies with respect.
- Not have or use alcohol, tobacco or illicit drugs on church grounds.
- Not have firearms or weapons of any sort on church property unless they are being used in a church-sponsored function and with proper adult supervision. (For example: knives may be used in craft projects with adult supervision only. Scouts may use Bows and Arrows always and only with adult supervision.)
- Use appropriate language. Use of swear words and obscenities are strongly discouraged.

- Exhibit appropriate behavior as required. Disobedient, disrespectful or obscene behavior is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

7. DISCIPLINE GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEERS AND PAID STAFF WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

When dealing with children and youth it is sometimes necessary to exercise disciplinary action in order to facilitate learning, maintain order and carry out planned activities in a safe manner.

Planning ahead for success:

- Disruptive behavior is diminished if enough learning opportunities are planned to keep children and youth engaged. It is better to over-plan than under-plan. Incorporate as age appropriate good story-telling techniques, drama, puppets, arts and crafts, cooking, scientific exploration, games, etc. Incorporating a varied learning environment helps all types of learners remain engaged.
- For overnight activities, boys and girls should have separate sleeping areas. This rule is made in order to keep CUMC from possible accusation of not providing adequate supervision.
- It is critical that the children, youth and parents know what the behavioral expectations are ahead of time and what the consequence will be for failure to meet the behavioral expectations.

When discipline becomes necessary:

- Volunteers and paid staff are authorized to handle minor discipline problems without need of involving parents or staff.
- Verbal re-direction may and should be exercised. Care must be taken not to embarrass the child/youth. It goes without saying that yelling, shaming and physical contact are all absolutely forbidden.
- If verbal redirection is not successful and/or the nature of the problem indicates further counseling is necessary, the child /youth should be counseled with 2 adults present and/or with the parent present with consequences for continued misbehavior outlined.
- If the behavioral expectations are not met at this point, the promised consequences should take place quickly and without fanfare.
- It may be necessary to set up a parent-volunteer-paid staff conference if behavioral problems are chronic. By working together it may be possible to come up with a plan to modify the misbehavior.
- Restriction of participation privileges may be enacted as the last resort.
- If laws have broken it is the responsibility of the volunteer or paid staff to contact the appropriate legal authorities.
- Legal action may be necessary and should take place where appropriate.

- Alert the Pastor of Family Ministry of any serious, reoccurring or chronic behavioral situations that concerns Sunday School or any other Christian education arena.
- Alert Staff/Pastor Parish Relations Committee (S/PPRC) of any serious, reoccurring or chronic behavioral situation involving paid staff.
- Notify Administrative Board of any serious, reoccurring or chronic behavioral situation involving groups that use the building but are not fully integrated into the church.
- Serious, reoccurring or chronic behavioral situation involving UMY activities or other groups that are sponsored by the church (like Scouts) should be taken to the Administrative Board.

8. COMMUNITY GROUPS

Leaders of community groups using the church facility and working with children or youth under 18 will be required to read this policy and sign a “Statement of Understanding and Intent Regarding CUMC Child Protection Policy” located in Appendix A. Church facilities will not be available to groups whose leaders refuse to sign this form.

9. PLAN FOR RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF CHILD ABUSE

- A. Any allegation of abuse or observation of signs of trouble, whether at Crozet UMC, at home or at school will be treated seriously, and handled with prayer, privacy, and most of all, Christian concern for the child or youth’s safety.
- B. Allegations of abuse or observations of signs of trouble will be immediately reported to the Director of the relevant ministry area and then to the Pastors.
If the allegations or observations are about the staff Director, they should be reported directly to the Pastors. If the allegations or observations are about a Pastor, the concern should be reported directly to the Chairperson of the Staff Parish Relations Committee and the Chairperson will directly notify the District Superintendent.
- C. The staff Director, Pastors and/or Chairperson of the Staff Parish Relations Committee will make initial inquiries to determine what the next steps should be to ensure the wellbeing of the child or youth. These inquiries will not rise to the level of an “investigation,” which is not an appropriate role for a church to take in such a situation.
- D. If inquiries lead to a determination that the child, youth or vulnerable adult or their family is in need of mentorship, food, clothing or housing support, or spiritual counsel, the staff Director and Pastors will work to connect them or their family with relevant ministries or government services.
- E. If inquiries lead to a conclusion that there is reason to suspect that child abuse (see above for the definition of child abuse in Virginia) may have occurred, the Pastor(s) (or, in the case that a Pastor is suspected of abuse, the District Superintendent) will contact the Virginia Department of Social Services, the parents/guardians of the child or youth (if they are not

already involved), the church's insurance company (if the abuse is alleged to involve church staff, volunteers or property) and the District Superintendent.

- F. Confidentiality will be maintained, to the extent possible, throughout the process, and Christian care and concern will be offered to every party. Crozet UMC pastors, staff and leaders will make no statements about or investigations into the truth or falsity of any allegations of abuse. If an accusation of abuse is made, as the Pastors or District Superintendent see fit, the alleged abuser will be temporarily relieved of assigned duties in the life of the church while the appropriate agencies conduct their investigation.

Appendix A

CROZET UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Statement of Understanding and Intent Regarding CUMC Child Protection Policy

I, the undersigned, have read CUMC's Child Protection Policy, understand what it means, and agree to abide by it.

I (my organization) will abide by CUMC's policy when working with children or youth both on and off church premises.

Signature _____ Date _____

Printed Name _____

Address _____

Phone Numbers: Home _____ Work _____

Name of organization using the church facility if other than church affiliated activity:

Appendix B

Tools for Assessing the Risk/Reducing the Risk

There are 3 areas to consider when assessing the potential risk of a given situation. Volunteers and paid staff will consider these 3 areas during the planning of and during actual events that involve children and youth.

1. Degree of Accountability: Assess the degree of accountability.

- Have adult leaders for this activity completed the screening process?
- Have adult leaders for this activity signed a “Statement of Understanding and Intent Regarding CUMC Child Protection Policy”?
- Have adult leaders for this activity completed Child Protection training?
- Is the 2-Adult Rule and/or Open Visibility Rule being maintained during this activity?
- If the activity is off grounds, has parental consent been sought from all participants?
- When accountability increases, risk decreases. When accountability decreases, risk increases.

2. Degree of isolation: Assess the degree of isolation.

- Is this an overnight activity? (If yes, opportunity for isolation increases.)
- Is this activity taking place off-grounds?
- Is this activity taking place in remote buildings or in classrooms that are isolated?
- Will adult volunteers or paid staff ever be alone with a child or youth during this activity? (In a car, etc.)
- Will a youth ever be alone with another youth or child, or will a child ever be left alone with a child?
- When isolation increases, risk increases. When isolation decreases, risk decreases

3. Degree of balance of power: Assess the degree of balance of power.

- Will adult volunteers or paid staff ever be alone with a child or youth during this activity? (For instance in a car, etc.)
- Will an older, bigger, stronger or more “popular” youth or child ever be alone with another youth or child that is younger, weaker, and less “popular”?
- Will children of the same age be able to “buddy” each other to the bathroom etc.? This is preferred over having an older child escort a younger child. When there is a balance of power, risk decreases. When there is an imbalance of power, risk increases.

Low-risk situations include:

- Activities where a group of children or youth are present for an activity (such as Christian Education classes, bible study, etc.)
- Where the activity takes place on church grounds during daylight hours
- Where open visibility into a classroom situation is maintained at all times

- Where floaters/hall monitors are present during the activity. In all settings it is always preferable to have 2 adults, however in low risk setting it is permissible for one adult to be present as long as all other criteria are strictly maintained.

High-risk situations include:

- Activities where one or few children or youth are present for an activity with one adult and the opportunity for one-to-one interaction between adult and youth/child is high, OR
- Where a large group of children or youth are present but the activity is spread out across an area to such an extent that children and youth cannot be adequately supervised by adults
- Where the activity is an overnight activity
- Where the activity takes place either off church grounds
- Where visibility is limited due to isolation are deemed high potential risksituations.

Volunteers and paid staff should recognize these as potentially high risk and take steps to reduce the risk to themselves and to children and youth by increasing the number of participants or adults present, by changing the venue for activity to a less remote location or moving the activity on grounds, or by changing the time of the activity. If the risk cannot be reduced, then the activity should be canceled. CUMC does not support any activity involving children and youth that takes place in a high-risksituation.