



Bluff Park United Methodist Church believes that all persons are significant to the growth of God’s kingdom and should have opportunity to worship, learn, and serve in various capacities to ensure personal growth and growth of others. We seek to provide an environment that is physically, emotionally and spiritually safe for all persons who enter our doors, especially children and youth. We seek to provide a safe environment in which opportunities for abuse are minimized through proper enlistment and supervision of those persons working with them.

It is our goal is to strive to be a “Safe Sanctuary” where we can work hand-in-hand growing our children and youth in their faith and a life devoted to Christ.

This policy contains theological foundations, definitions of child abuse, and policies/procedures related to prevention, response, and reporting.

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

“Then Jesus took a little child and put her among them; and taking her in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.’”(Paraphrase of Mark 9:36-37) Jesus also said, “If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones..., it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea.” (Matthew 18:6)

The Church, above all institutions, is called to welcome and nurture children. Our goal is to maintain a safe, secure, loving place where children may grow and where those who care for them may administer to their needs in responsible

ways. As caring Christians, we are committed to protect and serve as advocates for children and youth, participating in the life of our church.

The policy and procedures set forth below will apply to all people who provide supervision or have custody of children or who have opportunity to have contact with children in church facilities or church sponsored activities.

GENERAL DEFINITIONS

Child - A person under 19 years of age (§ 26-16-2, Ala. Code 1975)

Vulnerable Person – A vulnerable person is any person, regardless of age, whose behavior indicates that he/she is mentally incapable of adequately caring for himself/herself and his/her interest without adverse consequences to himself/herself or others, or who, because of physical or mental impairment, is unable to protect himself/herself from abuse, neglect, exploitation, sexual abuse, or emotional abuse by others.

Volunteer – A person who works with children or youth but is not paid by the church for such service

Youth Volunteer – A person between the ages of 12-18 who assists in a non-supervisory role with children and receives no income for such service

Caregiver – A person paid or not paid who is responsible for a vulnerable person. **Paid Staff** – Any person who is paid by the church on a full-time or part-time basis

DEFINITIONS OF ABUSE

Physical Abuse – Abuse in which a person deliberately causes physical harm to a child or vulnerable persons.

Emotionnel Abuse -- Exposing a child or vulnerable adult to spoken or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty.

Neglect – Abuse in which a person endangers a child's or vulnerable person's health, safety, or welfare through negligence.

Ritual Abuse – Abuse in which physical, sexual, or psychological violations of a child or vulnerable person are inflicted regularly, intentionally, and in a

stylized way by a person or persons responsible for the child's or vulnerable person's welfare.

Exploitation – Expenditure, lessening, or use of the property, assets, or resources of a vulnerable person without the express voluntary consent of that person or his/her legally authorized representative.

Financial Exploitation -- The use of deception, intimidation, undue influence, force, or threat of force to obtain or exert unauthorized control over a vulnerable person's property with the intent to deprive the vulnerable person of that property.

Sexual Abuse– Any touching of the sexual or intimate parts of a child or any other conduct done for the purpose of gratifying the sexual desire of either party through physical force or the threat, express or implied, that places a child in fear of immediate death or physical injury by a person 18 years old or older against another who is less than 16 years old, or by a person who is 4 or more years older than the victim.

SCREENING AND SUPERVISION PROCEDURES AND POLICIES

Screening Procedures for Paid and Volunteer Staff Working with Children and Vulnerable Persons

All persons who intend to work with children, youth, and vulnerable persons at Bluff Park United Methodist Church must be properly screened and all screening documents are to be kept on file in a secure location.

SCREENING PROCESS Employees

- Complete an application form
- Complete a consent to release confidential information
- Complete an interview by appropriate staff members

- Minimum of three references checked and verified
- Complete national background check every three years
- Drug and/or alcohol screening as deemed necessary and/or on demand
All records, forms and reports will become a part of the employee's confidential personnel file. These files are kept by the Church Administrator and are available to the Pastor, and the employee's immediate supervisor and members of the Staff Parrish Committee.

Volunteers

- Complete a confidential application form and Volunteer Covenant annually
 - Complete a training session with the appropriate staff person prior to serving and then not less than once a year by a district trainer.

- National Background check every three years
All records, forms and reports will become a part of the church's confidential Safe Sanctuary filing system. The files will be maintained by the church administrator or by a designated person at the senior pastor's or church administrator's discretion.

PROTECTION POLICY

The vitality of our ministries demands active volunteers who use their God given gifts in service of others. The following rules are designed to give a structure to volunteers while providing adequate care for our children, youth, and vulnerable persons.

Five-year Rule - All persons working with minors must be at least five years older than the age group they are leading/supervising

Six-month Rule - A volunteer must be a member of Bluff Park United Methodist Church, or a regular attendee, for a minimum of six (6) months to work in a supervisory role with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. Only with approval of the appropriate children's or youth minister, senior pastor or church administrator, may a volunteer serve as supervisor, who does not meet the six-month rule requirement.

Two Adult Rule – Two non-related and non-cohabiting adult workers will be present with children, youth, and vulnerable adults during church-related activities whenever possible except in emergency situations. An adult supervisor acting as a “floater” will make unannounced visits frequently when the two-adult rule is not feasible. In a room where there is a husband and wife team, they will be considered as one worker for purposes of this policy.

Adult to Child/Student/Vulnerable Persons Ratios – Birth to 30 months should have a 1:3 adult: child ratio, 2.5-5 years should have a 1:5 adult:child ratio, and 5+ should have a 1:10 adult:child ratio. The two-adult rule still applies to these ratios.

Minimum Age Rule – Persons who are in a paid or volunteer supervisory position must be at least nineteen (19) years old.

Minors – Volunteers under the age of eighteen (18) and over the age of twelve (12) will be allowed to volunteer in children’s ministry in a support function, but not in a supervisory role. They must also be at least five years older than the group they are leading.

Windows/Doors – Windows and/or half doors must provide visibility to all rooms in which minors or vulnerable persons meet or doors must remain open. Doors should never be locked when occupied.

Floater-A Safe Sanctuaries trained and cleared floater may be used to monitor rooms that have only one adult leading. The doors must remain open and the floater will randomly and frequently check-in on each class.

Local Activities – Compliance with this Safe Sanctuary policy is required of all employees and volunteers during any church-related activity.

Out-of-town Activities – A written parental consent form and medical release form will be provided for all participants. A consent form may be kept on file for the period of one year and will be considered valid until expiration at the end of said year. Compliance with this Safe Sanctuary Policy is required of all employees and volunteers during any church-related non-local activity.

Over-Night Activities - Males and females will have separate sleeping areas. There will be male and female chaperones if there are male and female children, youth, or vulnerable persons, and the two adult rule and the 1:10 ratio still apply. Adult volunteers will never share a bed with a minor or vulnerable person not even their own child. Adult volunteers will never be alone in a room with children, youth, or vulnerable persons. In a hotel setting, adults should never be alone in a

room with just one child, doors should open to a hallway, and joining rooms are best.

Counseling and visitation-Counseling children, youth, and vulnerable adults on church property should never be behind closed doors unless parents or caregivers are in the room. When visiting children, youth and vulnerable adults, at their home, parents and caregivers must always be present.

Transportation – Any activities that require transportation of minors will adhere to both the policies contained within this document and the Vehicle Usage policy. All drivers will be screened, trained, and must be properly insured. Drivers will undergo a complete background check including a MVR. Drivers must provide their license and proof of insurance. Two non-married or non-cohabiting adults must be in all church vehicles when used by children, youth, or vulnerable persons. Passenger records are required to be on board at all times. Parents will be given trip leader contact information in case of emergency. While caravanning no adult is to be alone in a car with just one student unless it is an immediate family member. Youth driving other youth or youth driving themselves is only permitted if they are going directly to an event and parent permission is given by all parties prior to the event.

PROCEDURES

Newborn Through Elementary Sign-In/Sign-Out: At all children's events, newborn-5th grade must be signed in by an adult. Newborn-2nd grade must be signed out by an adult, but 3rd grade-5th grade may sign themselves out as well as a younger sibling.

Youth Sign-In/Sign-Out: All Youth must sign in upon arrival to youth events via the existing electronic sign-in method.

Potty Procedures: Diapering is to be done by and adult in an open and visible area. Toddlers should have supervised independence-Let them ask. Elementary children and vulnerable persons should have complete privacy unless there is an emergency. Bathrooms should be checked before the child enters and parents contacted if there is an emergency.

VULNERABLE PERSONS

All Safe Sanctuaries policies apply. In addition, age-appropriate training, including training for dealing with special needs (including personal hygiene issues) will be conducted and verified annually for volunteers and staff persons working with vulnerable persons. Additionally, any persons working with vulnerable persons must be 19 years of age or older.

REPORTING PROCEDURES

Incidents of child abuse and/or neglect should be reported to law enforcement, local and district church authorities as well as our insurance agent and attorney. The priority should be as follows; law enforcement, legal counsel, insurance agent, district superintendent. The church conference authorities will identify any media contact should it be necessary.

§26-14-3, Code of Alabama (1975), requires that certain persons, including but not limited to, day care workers or employees, members of the clergy, or any other person called upon to render aid or medical assistance to any child, report known or suspected child abuse or neglect. However, volunteers are strongly encouraged to report abuse, even though they are not required by state mandate.

In addition to the requirements set forth in §26-14-3, Code of Alabama, (1975), §26-14-4, Code of Alabama (1975), permits any person to make a report of known or suspected child abuse or neglect if such person has reasonable cause to suspect that a child is or has been abused or neglected.

RESPONSES TO ALLEGATIONS

All allegations of child abuse will be taken seriously. Appropriate action for reporting an allegation will be taken immediately by church staff in accordance with the reporting laws of the State of Alabama, insurance policies and the advice of legal counsel.

The official spokesperson for Bluff Park United Methodist Church will be the Pastor or her or his appointee. No other staff members or church members will speak to the media in an official capacity.

Church staff will be responsible for written documentation regarding any and all efforts in response to an allegation. All documentation will be dated and have a signature.

Church staff will not deny, minimize, or blame any individual involved in allegations and will minister to all involved parties, as well as cooperate with authorities.

All care shall be taken to ensure confidentiality of all parties involved. Disclosure of information in relation to allegations is prohibited, except as required for reporting purposes.

RESOLUTION OF DISPUTES

Bluff Park United Methodist Church believes that the Bible commands Christians to make every effort to live at peace and resolve disputes with each other in private or in the Christian church (Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 6:1-8). Therefore, we seek to resolve issues in a fair manner while preserving or restoring relationships fractured by a dispute.

If a volunteer or staff person has been accused, but then is cleared by the proper state and local authorities, said staff or volunteer may reapply to return to a leadership role in children or youth ministries at Bluff Park United Methodist Church.

AMENDMENT POLICY

Any amendment to this policy may be made by the Board of Stewards at Bluff Park United Methodist Church after giving the congregation 30 days notice of the changes.