

Summit United Methodist Church

Safe Sanctuary Policy

I. Purpose

1. Summit United Methodist Church strives to provide a caring and secure environment for persons in all phases of church life.
2. To reduce risk and liability exposure for Summit United Methodist Church employees and volunteers, as well as a safe environment for members and guests.

II. Biblical Foundation

Summit United Methodist Church seeks to express God's love of children, youth, and adults and provide for their personal wholeness. This caring community seeks to prevent abuse of any form 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.

III. Types and Signs of Abuse

Source: <https://www.childwelfare.gov>

1. *Physical Abuse*

Physical abuse is nonaccidental physical injury (ranging from minor bruises to severe fractures or death) as a result of punching, beating, kicking, biting, shaking, throwing, stabbing, choking, hitting (with a hand, stick, strap, or other object), burning, or otherwise harming a child. Physical discipline, such as spanking or paddling, is not considered abuse as long as it is reasonable and causes no bodily injury to the child.

Signs of Physical Abuse

Consider the possibility of physical abuse when the child:

- Has unexplained burns, bites, bruises, broken bones, or black eyes
- Has fading bruises or other marks noticeable after an absence from school
- Seems frightened of the parents and protests or cries when it is time to go home • Shrinks at the approach of adults
- Reports injury by a parent or another adult caregiver
- Abuses animals or pets

Consider the possibility of physical abuse when the parent or other adult caregiver:

- Offers conflicting, unconvincing, or no explanation for the child's injury, or provides an explanation that is not consistent with the injury
- Describes the child as "evil" or in some other very negative way
- Uses harsh physical discipline with the child
- Has a history of abuse as a child
- Has a history of abusing animals or pets

2. *Neglect*

Neglect is the failure of a parent, guardian, or other caregiver to provide for a child's basic needs.

Neglect may be:

- Physical (e.g., failure to provide necessary food or shelter, or lack of appropriate supervision)
- Medical (e.g., failure to provide necessary medical or mental health treatment)
- Educational (e.g., failure to educate a child or attend to special education needs)
- Emotional (e.g., inattention to a child's emotional needs, failure to provide psychological care or permitting the child to use alcohol or other drugs)

Signs of Neglect

Consider the possibility of neglect when the child:

- Is frequently absent from school
- Begs or steals food or money
- Lacks needed medical or dental care, immunizations, or glasses
- Is consistently dirty and has severe body odor
- Lacks sufficient clothing for the weather
- Abuses alcohol or other drugs
- States that there is no one at home to provide care

Consider the possibility of neglect when the parent or other adult caregiver:

- Appears to be indifferent to the child
- Seems apathetic or depressed
- Behaves irrationally or in a bizarre manner
- Is abusing alcohol or other drugs

3. Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse includes activities by a parent or caregiver such as fondling a child's genitals, penetration, incest, rape, sodomy, indecent exposure, and exploitation through prostitution or the production of pornographic materials.

Signs of Sexual Abuse

Consider the possibility of sexual abuse when the child:

- Has difficulty walking or sitting
- Suddenly refuses to change for gym or to participate in physical activities
- Reports nightmares or bedwetting
- Experiences a sudden change in appetite
- Demonstrates bizarre, sophisticated, or unusual sexual knowledge or behavior
- Becomes pregnant or contracts a venereal disease, particularly if under age 14
- Runs away
- Reports sexual abuse by a parent or another adult caregiver
- Attaches very quickly to strangers or new adults in their environment

Consider the possibility of sexual abuse when the parent or other adult caregiver:

- Is unduly protective of the child or severely limits the child's contact with other children, especially of the opposite sex
- Is secretive and isolated
- Is jealous or controlling with family members

4. Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse (or psychological abuse) is a pattern of behavior that impairs a child's emotional development or sense of self-worth. This may include constant criticism, threats, or rejection, as well as withholding love, support, or guidance. Emotional abuse is often difficult to

prove, and therefore, child protective services may not be able to intervene without evidence of harm or mental injury to the child. Emotional abuse is almost always present when other types of maltreatment are identified.

Signs of Emotional Maltreatment

Consider the possibility of emotional maltreatment when the child:

- Shows extremes in behavior, such as overly compliant or demanding behavior, extreme passivity or aggression
- Is either inappropriately adult (parenting other children, for example) or inappropriately infantile (frequently rocking or head-banging, for example)
- Is delayed in physical or emotional development
- Has attempted suicide
- Reports a lack of attachment to the parent

Consider the possibility of emotional maltreatment when the parent or other adult caregiver:

- Constantly blames, belittles, or berates the child
- Is unconcerned about the child and refuses to consider offers of help for the child's problems
- Overtly rejects the child

5. *Ritual Abuse*

Ritual abuse is abuse in which physical, sexual, or psychological violations of a child are inflicted regularly, intentionally, and in a stylized way by a person(s) responsible for the child's welfare.

IV. Paid Staff

In an effort to create the safest possible environment within the Summit United Methodist Church, several abuse prevention measures will be utilized and carried out by the SPPRC (Staff Pastor Parish Relations Committee).

1. *Paid Staff Screening*

Paid staff must complete a job application, I-9 Employment Eligibility Verification form, Act 33 PA Childline Clearance, Act 34 PA State Police Criminal Background check, FBI Criminal Background Check (fingerprints) Clearances will be paid for by the applicant. These clearances need to be updated every 5 years. No other clearances will be accepted. All considered applicants must submit to the interview process set up by SPPR committee within the church. The SPPRC reserves the right to follow up on any questionable references or clearances. Any information collected will be placed in a confidential file. The SPPR committee will have the right to reject any applicant if legitimate concerns are raised about their history or suitability for work concerning abuse.

2. *Paid Staff Training*

Before beginning their first year of service, all paid staff will be required to read the church's safe sanctuary policy and sign a form indicating that they have read and understand the policy and agree to abide by it. Upon renewal of clearances (every 5 years), employee must read and sign safe sanctuary policy. Employee review of policy revisions will be completed as needed.

V. Volunteers

In an effort to create the safest possible environment within the Summit United Methodist Church, several abuse prevention measures will be utilized and carried out by the SPPR committee. These measures include screening of volunteer leaders who are responsible for children, youth, and vulnerable adults for past child abuse convictions or expungements, six-month rule, use of two adult rule, five year older guideline, standards for appropriate classroom discipline, open classroom, travel and overnight guidelines, and restroom guidelines.

1. *Volunteer Screening*

All adult volunteers 18 years and older that accept positions working with children, youth, vulnerable adults will be required to have an Act 33 PA Childline Clearance and Act 34 PA State Police Criminal Record Check on file. Clearances will need to be renewed every 5 years. If a volunteer has not been a PA resident for at least 10 years, then he/she shall also have to obtain an FBI Criminal Background Check (fingerprints). This clearance will be paid for by the volunteer. Clearances will be kept in a confidential file in the church office.

2. *Volunteer Training*

All volunteers including Vacation Bible School teachers and helpers, nursery workers, children's Sunday School teachers, Junior Church leaders, youth leaders, and Stephen Ministers will be required to read the church's safe sanctuary policy and sign a form indicating that they have read and understand the policy and agree to abide by it. This review should be done every 5 years when renewing clearances. Anyone failing to do so, will be contacted. If the volunteer does not sign after being contacted and has not renewed clearances, that person will not be permitted to serve until the policy has been read, the form signed, and clearances renewed.

3. *Six Month Rule*

The Summit United Methodist Church will not use anyone as a volunteer for children or youth activities in the church unless they are a member or a regular attendee of the church for at least six months.

4. *Two Adult Rule*

Whenever possible, teachers, nursery workers, and Junior Church leaders will be assigned in teams of two or more to every class of children or youth. Concerted effort will be made to recruit sufficient numbers of volunteers to permit such team teaching with unrelated adults. All church sponsored activities of children or youth should have two or more leaders (not only husband and wife) present. When the group includes both boys and girls, both male and female leaders (not only husband and wife) should be present. If the group stays overnight at the church, or if a church sponsored group leaves the premises, two or more leaders (not only husband and wife) must be present and must include at least one male and one female if the

group is mixed gender. Any outings will require permission slips. If permission slip is not brought in, a verbal okay from the parent/guardian heard by two adults will be allowed.

5. *Five Year Older Guideline*

All volunteers including youth helpers must be at least 5 years older than the children they are working with. No person in authority should be less than 18 years of age.

6. *Classroom Discipline*

All teachers and workers will use the following discipline measures. If a child is behaving inappropriately, the teacher or worker will tell the child specifically what he/she is doing that is not acceptable and state what the expected behavior is. If this measure is not effective, the child will be guided to another activity. If the child's disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, a responsible adult will be summoned and the child will be left under his/her supervision in an open area. No physical punishment or verbal abuse, e.g., ridicule, is to be used at any time. If isolating the child within the classroom or removal of the child from the room becomes necessary, the situation will be discussed with the child's parents or the guardian as soon as possible.

7. *Open Classrooms*

Classrooms or childcare rooms will have windows so that observations can take place without prior notice by church staff, parents, or other volunteer church workers. Windows should not be covered completely so observations of child care rooms and classrooms of children and youth can take place.

8. *Travel Guidelines*

When traveling in church-owned, rented, or personal vehicles the two adult rule applies. An exception of the two adult rule will be made if personally owned vehicles are traveling in a caravan. Drivers must have clearances on file in the church office and proper insurance. Permission slips and health related documents of passengers must be on board. No youth will be permitted to drive other youth. A youth may drive themselves and siblings with parent permission.

9. *Overnight Guidelines*

Adult volunteers should never share a bed with a child and never be alone in a room with a child. Adults must be of the same gender as the students they are chaperoning. In a hotel setting, adults should never be in a room with just one child. Exit doors should open to a hallway. It is best if the block of rooms reserved is in the same area. In a cabin setting with multiple bunk beds, there must be at least two adults present.

10. Restroom Guidelines

When using the restroom, children should have complete privacy. The restroom should be checked for adults before a child enters. The best position for supervising children in a multi-stall restroom is to have one foot in and one foot out. Assist children only when requested unless it is an emergency. Contact parents if needed. Diapering should be done in an open, visible area.

VI. Reporting Procedures

Any person observing or receiving disclosure of child abuse is a mandated reporter under Pennsylvania Law and must report this incident to PA Childline **1-800-932-0313** and to the pastor.

VII. Policy Review

It will be the responsibility of the SPPRC to review the Safe Sanctuary Policy every five years. If changes are made to the policy it will be presented to Church Council for final review and approval. The policy should then be posted in a public area to ensure that leaders of community groups of children and youth who use the church facilities are aware of this policy.