

Wright's Chapel United Methodist Church

Child Protection Policy and Procedures

I. Our Mission

Wright's Chapel United Methodist Church strives to provide a safe spiritual home in which each young person

1. comes to know Christ personally;
2. experiences the joy of the Lord; and
3. develops a strong Christian foundation

with the objective of inspiring life-long growth in the young person's walk with Christ and a strong relationship with the Church.

II. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to help Wright's Chapel United Methodist Church provide a caring and secure environment for children, youth and the adults involved in ministering to such persons in all phases of the Church's life.

III. Biblical Foundation

Wright's Chapel United Methodist Church seeks to express God's love of young persons and to provide for their personal wholeness. This caring community seeks to provide an environment which is caring and secure for all persons. The Bible is foundational to our understanding upon which all policies, procedures and ministries must stand.

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 His hands upon them.

(Mark 10:13-16).

Jesus teaches us explicitly that young persons have the right and the keys to the Kingdom of God. He demonstrated this through blessing and touch. Our goal in response to this Biblical mandate is to maintain a safe, secure and loving place where children may grow.

IV. The Law

Under Virginia law Section 63.1-248.2, an abused child is defined as one who is less than eighteen years of age, whose parents or others persons responsible for his/her care creates or inflicts, or threatens to create or inflict, or allows to be created or inflicted upon such a child a physical or mental injury by other than accidental means, or creates a substantial risk of death of disfigurement, or impairment of bodily or mental functions. This includes the following: failure to provide care necessary for health, abandonment, commits or allows sexual exploitation, is endangered or neglected. Child abuse may be physical, sexual, emotional or mental, and may be the result of actions or omissions to act. (e.g., lack of care for a child).

Section 63.1-248.3 of the Virginia code states that “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 persons 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 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 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.” (Emphasis added)

In addition, everyone should report any known or reasonably suspected child abuse immediately. Any report is confidential and the person making the **report** is immune from liability for making such a report, unless it is proven that such a person acted in bad faith or with malicious intent.

V. Types of Child Abuse

A. Definition

Child abuse refers to an act committed by a parent, care giver or person in a position of trust (even though he/she may not care for the child on a daily basis) 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 in this section are from the Virginia Department of Social Services.

B. Types of Abuse

1. 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. Examples: asphyxiation; bone fracture; brain damage, skull fracture, subdural hematoma; burns, scalding; cuts, bruises, welts, abrasions; internal injuries, poisoning; sprains; dislocations; gunshot,stabbing wounds.

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

3. Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse includes any act defined in the code of Virginia which is committed, or allowed to be committed, upon a child by his/her parent or other persons responsible for the child's care. Examples of such abuse are: sexual exploitation, sexual molestation, intercourse/sodomy and other sexual abuse.

4. Medical Neglect

Refusal or failure by 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.

5. Failure to Thrive

A syndrome of infancy or early childhood which 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 the syndrome is diagnosed by a physician and is caused by non-organic factors.

6. Mental Abuse/Neglect

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

7. Educational Neglect

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

8. Bizarre Discipline

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

IV. Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse

In an effort to create the safest possible environment within Wright's Chapel United Methodist Church, several abuse prevention measures will be utilized.

These measures include screening and application for paid and volunteer workers for past child abuse convictions or expungements, use of the two leader rule, standards of appropriate classroom discipline and open classrooms.

1. Six Month Rule

Wright's Chapel UMC will not use anyone as a sole leader for children or youth ministries in the church unless such person has had continuous active involvement in the church for at least six (6) months. Parents may volunteer in a group in which their child participates prior to being involved for six months.

2. Staff Screening and Application

Before beginning the first year of service, each employed or volunteer leader for children or youth ministries, children or youth teacher, child care worker, or youth worker will be asked to sign a statement indicating that he/she has never been convicted of child abuse nor had such a conviction expunged. Also, the screening form or application may ask for the following: general information, criminal convictions, prior church membership, prior church volunteer work, prior experience with children or youth, and references. Employed workers with children and youth shall also undergo a criminal record check. The church will cover the cost of this check. Anyone who has had a child abuse conviction or expungement, as well as anyone refusing to sign the statement, will not be permitted to work with children or youth. All existing leaders and workers with children and youth will comply with this paragraph by June 1, 2004 in order to continue in their positions.

3. Staff Training

Before beginning their first year of service, all paid and volunteer leaders, child care workers, children and youth Sunday School teachers and youth workers will be required to read the church's child protection policy and sign a form indicating that they have read and that they understand the policy and agree to abide by it. No one should serve who has not read the policy and signed the statement.

Leaders of community groups of children or youth who use the church facility, including its outdoor facilities will be required to present a copy of their child protection policy to be on file at the church. If the group does not have a child protection policy, they will be required to adopt this policy. Their leaders will need to read and sign the policy.

4. Two Leader Rule

Whenever possible, leaders should be assigned in teams of two or more for all children's activities. No adult should ever be alone with fewer than three children. If there are only one or two children in a group and only one adult, that group should either combine with another group or be cancelled. If an adult has a background check on file at the church, that person may be with fewer than three children without another adult present.

The two leader rule should apply to youth programming as appropriate. There

are situations in which the presence of two adults would hinder the program. In these cases, one adult may be present, but there should be more than one youth present as well. If an adult has a background check on file at the church, that person may be with fewer than two youth without another adult present.

If any group stays overnight at the church, or if a church sponsored group leaves the premises overnight, two or more leaders must be present and must include at least one male and one female if the group is mixed in gender. If a group from the church is attending a larger gathering, adults from other groups may be considered a part of the church's group without those persons having signed this policy.

5. Classroom Discipline

All leaders and workers with children and youth should use the following discipline measures. If a child is behaving inappropriately, the leader or worker should tell the child specifically what he/she is doing that is not acceptable and state what the expected behavior is, e.g., "We do not throw blocks. We use blocks for building." If this measure is not effective, the child should be guided to another activity. If inappropriate behavior continues, the child may be placed at a table to work alone away from the other students. If the child's disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, the child may be taken to the parent or the primary leader for the activity and left under his or her supervision. No physical punishment or verbal abuse, e.g., ridicule, are 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 guardian as soon as possible.

6. Open Classrooms

Classrooms or child care rooms may be visited without prior notice by church staff, parents, or other volunteer church workers, e.g. Sunday School Superintendent, at any time. Brief observations of child care rooms and classrooms of children or youth are conducted by the pastor or the primary leader during all activities.

7. Child Protection Committee

The Charge Conference, upon nomination by the Nominations & Personnel Committee, shall annually elect a Child Protection Committee. The membership of the Child Protection Committee shall include the pastor and not less than three nor more than five members of the church. The Child Protection Committee shall annually review and propose any revisions to this Policy, and shall be responsible for the administration and interpretations of this Policy.

VII. Reporting Child Abuse

Should there be an allegation of child abuse at Wright's Chapel United Methodist Church, the following procedures shall be followed:

1. Any allegation of child abuse shall be treated seriously.
2. Pray for the church and all persons affected by the allegation.
3. Immediately begin documenting all procedures which occur in handling the allegation.
4. Immediately notify the pastor and/or a member of the Child Protection Committee of the substance of the allegations, unless the allegations involve the pastor. The person notified shall immediately contact the pastor and/or other members of the Committee. As many members of the Committee as are immediately accessible shall be convened either in person or by telephone and the allegations shall be evaluated initially to determine whether there is a reason to suspect that child abuse may have occurred. The function of the Committee at this stage is not to conduct an investigations, but to determine, based upon the allegations and the information then in the possession of the Committee, whether a reason to suspect exists. In making such determination, the Committee shall avail itself of such counsel as it deems necessary and as is immediately available, including, but not limited to, consultation with an attorney, with a representative of the church's insurance company, with the district superintendent, and anonymously with the Virginia Department of Social Services.
 - a. If the allegations involve the pastor, the Chairperson of the Staff-Parish Committee shall be notified immediately and he or she shall immediately notify the district superintendent who shall direct the next steps taken by the church in responding to the allegations. The provisions of this Policy shall continue to apply except as the district superintendent directs that other steps be taken.
5. If the Child Protection Committee determines that there is a reason to suspect that child abuse may have occurred, then the following steps shall be taken:
 - a. Immediately notify the Virginia Department of Social Services of the allegation.
 - b. Immediately notify the parents if it is not known that they have previous knowledge.
 - c. Immediately notify the church's insurance company.
 - d. Immediately notify the district superintendent.

6. Do not confront the accused with the allegation. If the accused has assigned duties within the life of the church and the Child Protection committee determines that the steps outlined in paragraph VII (5) above are appropriate, that person must be temporarily relieved of their duties until the investigation is concluded.

7. The pastor should extend whatever care and resources are necessary to those impacted by the allegation, but under no circumstances should the pastor or any church leader or member investigate the allegation. In providing care to the principals (alleged victim and the accused) and their families, the pastor or church leader, should under **no** circumstances be drawn into a discussion of the truth or falsity of the allegation which could contaminate the investigation. Do not assign blame or take any steps that involve establishing or refuting the allegation.

8. It is appropriate to show care and comfort for the alleged victim. This should be the pastoral objective from the moment the allegation is received or otherwise made known.

9. Observe confidentiality for both the alleged victim and the accused until advised to the contrary by the Child Protection Committee.

10. There shall be a single spokesperson for the Church who shall be designated by the Child Protection Committee.

VIII Policy Review

The Child Protection Policy and Procedures of Wright's Chapel United Methodist Church shall be reviewed annually by the Child Protection committee and then by the Administrative Council. A verification follow-up report will be made each year at Charge Conference to ensure the integrity of the policy and procedures.

Return To _____
Wright's Chapel United Methodist Church
P.O. Box 193
Ladysmith, VA 22501

After reviewing the foregoing Policy and Procedures, please sign, date, detach and return this portion to indicate that you have read, understood and accept the Child Protection Policy and Procedures of Wright's Chapel United Methodist Church.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Phone Number _____

I have read and understand the Child Protection Policy and Procedures of Wright's Chapel United Methodist Church. I agree to abide by those policies and procedures. I have no convictions for child abuse or expungements of such convictions. I authorize and release any references or church which I might provide to Wright's Chapel United Methodist Church to provide the Church any information (including opinions) that they may have regarding my work with children and/or youth.

Signature

Date