

**Avon United Methodist Church  
6850 E US HIGHWAY 36  
AVON, IN 46123**

**Safe Sanctuary**

Avon United Methodist Church is committed to providing a safe environment for to ALL children, teens and vulnerable adults. Our decisions are motivated by love for people and guided by the Holy Spirit. Our goal is to reach out to children and teens through the Gospel, to lead them to put their trust in Christ, and to help them to become His devoted followers.<sup>1</sup> Part of fulfilling our mission entails providing “safe sanctuary” for ALL of God’s people!

God charges those of us in the leadership of Avon UMC to be proactive in ensuring all children, youth and vulnerable adults the right to “safe sanctuary.” A key element in this “safe space” is the protection of children and other vulnerable persons from abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where children and vulnerable adults grow strong in Him.

In Matthew 18:6, Jesus states "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." The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church state that "...children must be protected from economic, physical and sexual exploitation and abuse."<sup>2</sup> Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to the little ones, the children.

Not only is our Christian obligation to protect our most vulnerable, but our legal duty. Child abuse laws make it illegal to physically, emotionally, or sexually abuse minors. Child abuse laws are intended to balance the protection of children from serious harm with a parent's interest in raising and disciplining their children as they see fit. In Indiana, it's considered child abuse if a child's mental or physical condition is seriously endangered or impaired:<sup>3</sup>

## **I. Definitions**

A description of the role staff and lay members who work with children and vulnerable adults.<sup>4</sup>

### **A. “Child” and “Teen” and “Vulnerable Adult”**

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<sup>1</sup> Children’s Council Mission Statement. (2020). <https://www.avonumc.com/childrens-ministry/>.

<sup>2</sup> Book of Resolutions: Discipline Children without Corporal Punishment. (2016). Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church. <https://www.umc.org/en/content/book-of-resolutions-discipline-children-without-corporal-punishment>

<sup>3</sup> Indiana Child Abuse Laws. (2018, July). <https://statelaws.findlaw.com>. <https://statelaws.findlaw.com/indiana-law/indiana-child-abuse-laws.html#:~:text=Indiana%20Child%20Abuse%20Laws.%20However%2C%20in%20Indiana%2C%20any,abuse%20or%20neglect%20is%20a%20class%20B%20misdemeanor.>

<sup>4</sup> ABUSE PROTECTION POLICY OF THE INDIANA CONFERENCE UMC FOR CONFERENCE OR DISTRICT EVENTS AND PROGRAM AGENCIES. (2020). Inumc.Org. [https://www.inumc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/CC6C7D6631AE473EBC257850CE67EDC3\\_Abuse-Protection-Policy-Aug23-2011.pdf](https://www.inumc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/CC6C7D6631AE473EBC257850CE67EDC3_Abuse-Protection-Policy-Aug23-2011.pdf)

Following the public school system, a “child” is anyone age of 11 or under. A “teen” is anyone not a “child” and under the age of 18. “Vulnerable Adults” are persons over 18 years of age with physical, mental and/or developmental disabilities and have finished high school.<sup>5</sup>

#### **B. “Paid Staff Person” and “Adult Screened Volunteer”**

A Paid Staff Person is someone paid by the church, overseen by Staff Parish and screened. An Adult Screened Volunteer, may or may not be members of the church, is unpaid and has gone through the screening process. Additionally, adult screened volunteers must receive approval from members of the Ministry branch prior to serving.

#### **C. Youth Helpers**

Youth Helpers are below the age of 18 years assisting with child or youth activities. They can assist with activities but should not be considered an adult volunteer and should be supervised themselves.

#### **D. “Child/Youth Abuse”**

For purposes of this Policy, child/youth abuse includes any of the following: Child abuse covers a wide variety of issues. At a basic level, child abuse is an action or lack of action by the parent, guardian or custodian seriously endangering the child's physical or mental health.<sup>6</sup>

1. Physical Abuse: abuse of a child refers to the infliction of intentional physical harm to a child by a parent, caregiver, or other individual who is responsible for the child's welfare. Physical abuse can include such acts as beating, hitting, punching, kicking, shaking, throwing, suffocating, choking, burning, stabbing, poisoning, or deliberately inducing illness. Although somewhat controversial, spanking is not considered to be physical abuse when it does not inflict bodily injury onto the child. However, discipline that is imposed on a child that is inappropriate for his or her age or physical condition is considered to be abuse.<sup>7</sup>
2. Sexual Abuse: A child or vulnerable person is the victim of a sex offense (rape, criminal deviate conduct, child molestation, exploitation, seduction, sexual misconduct with a minor, public indecency, prostitution or incest). For purposes of this policy, sex abuse is also defined to include possession or viewing of obscene, explicit, or pornographic material in the proximity of a child or vulnerable person.<sup>8</sup>
3. Emotional Abuse: abuse of a child refers to the infliction of psychological damage onto a child. While any type of maltreatment can lead to severe emotional damage, there are also specific types of behaviors that are defined as emotional abuse.

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<sup>5</sup> Ages and Stages. (2019). American Academy of Pediatrics. <https://www.healthychildren.org/english/ages-stages/pages/default.aspx>

<sup>6</sup> In.gov. (2018). *What is child abuse and neglect?* . Retrieved from Department of Child Services: <https://faqs.in.gov/hc/en-us/articles/115005223068-What-is-child-abuse-and-neglect->

<sup>7</sup> Premier Physical Abuse & Neglect Trauma Treatment Facility Serving Indianapolis and Surrounding Areas. (2018). Resource Residential Treatment Facility. <https://www.resourcetreatmentcenter.com/ptsd/abuse-neglect/>

<sup>8</sup> ABUSE PROTECTION POLICY OF THE INDIANA CONFERENCE UMC FOR CONFERENCE OR DISTRICT EVENTS AND PROGRAM AGENCIES. (2020). Inumc.Org. [https://www.inumc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/CC6C7D6631AE473EBC257850CE67EDC3\\_Abuse-Protection-Policy-Aug23-2011.pdf](https://www.inumc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/CC6C7D6631AE473EBC257850CE67EDC3_Abuse-Protection-Policy-Aug23-2011.pdf)

Limiting physical contact with a child (e.g. not hugging, kissing, or providing a child with any type of affection), ignoring or rejecting a child, calling a child names, and belittling, humiliating, or shaming a child are all forms of emotional abuse. Telling a child that he or she is bad, worthless, or a mistake is also considered psychological mistreatment. Additionally, exposing a child to the abuse of or violence against others can be classified as emotional abuse.<sup>9</sup>

## **II. Screening and Selection of Church Staff and Adult Volunteers**

The Pastor and the Staff Parish Relations Committee in partnership with the Director of Children's Ministry is charged with the responsibility of developing, implementing and evaluating the process for recruiting, screening, selecting, training and the supervision of non-appointed church staff and adult volunteers.<sup>10</sup>

- A. Adult volunteers who regularly work with the Church's children and youth and each church paid staff person will be screened. (steps 1 & 2 may be assigned to the applicant simultaneously if deemed appropriate)
  - 1. Each person applying to work with children and/or youth shall "authorize" the church to conduct a national criminal background check.
    - a) The policy of the conference recommends at minimum that background screenings for all volunteers with youth and children include a National Sex Offender Registry screening and a Multi-State Felony Background check.<sup>11</sup> (repeated every 2-3 years)
  - 2. Those who will work regularly with children, youth and/or vulnerable adults will be trained through MinistrySafe, an online training in Sexual Abuse Awareness prior to beginning their regular involvement with children and youth.
    - a) At the completion of the training, the applicant will take a 25 question quiz over the material in which a score of 70% or higher is required to serve.
  - 3. After the interview, background check, and/or training have been completed, the decision will be made to accept or reject the applicant as a paid staff member or adult volunteer who will work with children, youth and/or vulnerable adults.
    - a) All records will be kept in a secured, online database: MinistrySafe.
    - b) Where it has been determined that an applicant should not work with children, youth and/or vulnerable adults, those persons involved with the decision should handle it in a sensitive manner. The appointed clergy should inform the applicant in person within 30 days. The specific reasons for the decision should be given, whenever possible.
    - c) Where it has been determined that an applicant is fit to work with children, youth and/or vulnerable adults, the appropriate individual in the area of ministry in which the applicant would like to serve will direct the applicant to website to read the AUMC Child, Youth and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy.

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<sup>9</sup> Premier Physical Abuse & Neglect Trauma Treatment Facility Serving Indianapolis and Surrounding Areas. (2018). Resource Residential Treatment Facility. <https://www.resourcetreatmentcenter.com/ptsd/abuse-neglect/>

<sup>10</sup> The United Methodist Church Book of Discipline. (2016). <https://www.cokesbury.com/Book-of-Discipline-Book-of-Resolutions-Free-Versions>

<sup>11</sup> ABUSE PROTECTION POLICY OF THE INDIANA CONFERENCE UMC FOR CONFERENCE OR DISTRICT EVENTS AND PROGRAM AGENCIES. (2020). Inumc.Org. <https://www.inumc.org/wp->

- B. Before beginning work with either children, youth or vulnerable adults, each paid staff member and screened adult volunteer will sign a statement that they have read, understood, and agree to abide by this Child, Youth and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy, the Participation Covenant.
- C. Although not required to personally accomplish the above tasks, the appointed clergy and Director of Children's Ministry shall be responsible for ensuring compliance with sub-paragraphs (A) and (B) above.

### **III. Ongoing Education of Persons Who Work With Children and Youth**

The Director of Children's Ministry shall ensure that regularly scheduled (i.e., at least annually) reminders are sent to paid staff and adult screened volunteers, emphasizing the priority of safe sanctuaries. The regularly scheduled reminders will focus on current issues of children, youth and vulnerable adults. MinistrySafe Sexual Abuse Training is required, every five years, of all paid staff members and screened adult volunteers who work consistently with children, teens and/or vulnerable adults.

- A. That reminders may include, but are not be limited to, the following elements:  
familiarization with this policy, recognition of the signs of abuse; avoidance of situations when, where and how abuse might take place; and the discernment of conduct which could be perceived as potentially, if not actually, abusive; reporting requirements related to abuse; the policy for responding to an accusation or allegation of said abuse; and communication procedures related to previous aforementioned points.

### **IV. Supervision of Children and Youth**

#### **A. General Rules**

- 1. All activities involving children and youth will be supervised by at least two adults.
  - a.) The **"Two Person Rule"** is defined as either having at least two people in any classroom setting, one of which must be a screened adult volunteer or staff person **OR** one screened adult, volunteer or staff person, and a designated person periodically check each classroom.
  - b). Where the two adults are family members, a third adult will be present.
- 2. Doors in each room set aside for children/youth should always remain open. Windows and half doors are in place for Nursery and Toddler rooms to keep children from wandering outside the classroom.

#### **B. Open Door Policy**

Parents, volunteers or staff of the church will be permitted, as reasonableness dictates, to visit and observe all programs and classrooms at any time.

#### **C. Sign-in/Sign-out Procedure**

Parents and legal guardians, responsible for children who are **infant through 4<sup>th</sup> grade**, should sign-in and sign-out their child(ren) using the electronic sign in system. Parents must fill out a

form for those authorized person(s) to whom the child may be signed-out. **Picking-up children by non-authorized adults is forbidden.** (See Appendix V – Parental consent to pick up)

D. Time Following Group Events

1. Following child/youth group events, two paid staff and/or screened adult volunteers must remain and be present until transportation has arrived for all of the children/youth. Staff and volunteers should understand their role in keeping all safe.

V. Transportation

Transporting children and youth is an important concern. Their safety can be at risk in a variety of ways. Therefore, certain discretion must be used depending upon the event attended, the locale of the event, and the age group participating. This Policy includes both Requirements and Guidelines. When feasible, there should be adherence to the recommendations in the Guidelines. It is expected that the Requirements will always be followed.

A. Requirements

1. Drivers must be known to the designated adult leader of the event.
2. When children and/or youth are **transported in any personal vehicle**, at minimum 2 adults or 1 adult and 3 youth are required. The driver must be either the child's/youth's parent/guardian, a screened adult or a paid staff person, or a youth 17 years of age or older with written permission from both, the driver and the passenger's parents/guardians. (Appendix V Parental consent to pick up and/or ride with)
  - a) When there is reason to believe it would not be safe for a youth to ride in a vehicle, the adults responsible should intervene and take reasonable steps to make alternative arrangements for all concerned.
3. When a child/youth is **transported in a church-owned vehicle**, the driver must be at least 21 years of age with a valid driver's license for the vehicle being operated and whom a motor vehicle record search has been made and the record has been found to be satisfactory.
  - a) A copy of the driver's license should be on file at the church.
  - b) An "approved driver list" for church-owned vehicles is located by the church mailboxes and driving records are stored in the Business Managers office in a locked cabinet.
    - a. A driver must receive training provided by the trustees to be placed on the "approved driver list."
  - c) Drivers will read and sign an acknowledgement form indicating that the Child Protection Policy has been read and will be followed (See Appendix IV).
  - d) Drivers should be advised of a designated route and should not deviate from it except in cases of emergency or road detours.
4. Drivers must require that seat belts be used at all times and the number of passengers must not exceed the number of seat belts.

5. Parent must provide written consent prior to transporting any person(s) under the age of 18. (Appendix VI- PARENTAL CONSENT AND MEDICAL AUTHORIZATION and Appendix V-Parental consent to pick up and/or ride with)

6. When a trip is planned and the destination is expected to be 100 miles or more from the point of departure, waivers (APPENDIX V-Parental consent to pick up and/or ride with and APPENDIX VI- PARENTAL CONSENT AND MEDICAL AUTHORIZATION) will be on-file with the Business Manager.

**B. Guidelines**

1. It is preferred that drivers be accompanied by at least one other adult, at minimum 1 adult and 3 youth are required.
2. Drivers should receive training for the church owned vehicle being operated.
3. Youth who drive their own vehicles should be reminded regularly of the importance of vehicle safety.

**VI. Trip and Retreat Supervision**

Trip and Retreat settings can call for different child/youth protection requirements depending on the circumstances. The Requirements should always be implemented. Depending on the circumstances of the setting, who is in attendance, etc., those in charge of the trip or retreat should be mindful of the in applying their own wisdom to the needs of a given occasion.

**A. Requirements**

1. There will be at least two screened adults present for all trips, retreats and other events where the children and/or youth gather overnight at, or away from, the church campus.
2. There will be at least one screened adult for each gender present at co-ed overnight events. At single gender overnight events, two screened adults present shall be of the same gender as the child/youth.
  - a. Sleeping arrangements will consist of at least one, gender specific, screened adult for each gender specific group on co-ed overnight events (minimum 1 adult and 3 youth are required).
3. The person in charge of youth/children for each overnight trip and/or retreat shall carry parental permission slips including permission for emergency medical care. (See Appendix VI)
  - a.) A copy of the parental permission form with emergency medical care will be located in the business manager's office.

**VII. On-line Safety**

One cannot help but acknowledge that electronic media is useful in supporting children, youth and vulnerable adult ministries. However, it should also be acknowledged that these communication technologies potentially pose a risk to the safety and security of the aforementioned ministries. Church computers that are set up for guests or program participants to access the internet should be located in high-traffic areas and randomly, but frequently, monitored by staff.

- A. Paid staff person(s) or screened adult volunteer(s) are NOT permitted to “friend” or “follow” any person under 18 years of age.
- B. Paid staff person(s) or screened adult volunteer(s) are NOT permitted to text or message any person under 18 years of age.
  - 1. If communication is essential via text or messenger platform, the parent or legal guardian, a screened adult volunteer and/or paid staff person needs to be included.
- C. Online Sunday School, or any other virtual meetings that include children and/or youth with less than three children/youth/vulnerable adults, needs to be recorded to adhere to Safe Sanctuary policies.

### **VIII. Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse**

Any allegation about staff or volunteers must be taken seriously. An allegation can come before, during, or after an event and/or class from anyone. If any staff or volunteer receives an allegation about the behavior of staff or a volunteer, follow the reporting procedures below:

- A. The person reporting and a staff member need to fill out a “Child/Youth Protection Incident Report Form” form. (See Appendix VIII- Child/Youth Protection Incident Report Form)
- B. Immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the accused, the accused staff/volunteer must be removed from service until the situation can be investigated and resolved. In all cases, regardless of the identity of the accused, the staff member must make a written report to the Senior Pastor.
- C. In Indiana, any individual who suspects that a child is being abused or neglected has a duty to report. Suspected child abuse or neglect can be reported to the Indiana Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline at 1-800-800-5556. IC 31-33-5 and IC 12-17.2-3.5 require child care staff and volunteers to report suspected child abuse and neglect. Failure to do so is a class B misdemeanor.<sup>12</sup>
- D. Take all allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim’s family. Show care and support to help prevent further hurt. Extend whatever pastoral resources are needed. Remember that the care and safety of the victim is the first priority. Respond in a positive and supportive manner to the victim and the victim’s family.

In all cases, regardless of the identity of the accused, the staff leadership must make a written report to the Senior Pastor and the District Superintendent after he or she has made a report to Child Protective Services, Adult Protective Services, or law enforcement

NOTE: The question that sometimes arises is: What about a “confidential communication” with a clergy person?

Again, the moral imperative is to do that which will best protect children, teens, adults and all parties involved.

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<sup>12</sup> Indiana Child Abuse Laws. (2018, July). <https://statelaws.findlaw.com/indiana-law/indiana-child-abuse-laws.html#:~:text=Indiana%20Child%20Abuse%20Laws.%20However%2C%20in%20Indiana%2C%20any,abuse%20or%20neglect%20is%20a%20class%20B%20misdemeanor.>

### VIII. Implementation

It shall be the responsibility of the Director of Children's Ministry to implement this Policy, to design and conduct future training, and to ensure the ongoing effectiveness of this Policy.

### IX. Responding

All of those who participate in the life of this congregation and use its facilities – individuals, organizations, and groups within and outside this congregation -- are expected to respect, implement, and adhere to these provisions as a minimum.

### **Adoption**

This Safe Sanctuary Policy is adopted by action of the SPRC of the  
AVON United Methodist Church this 15<sup>th</sup> day of  
April, 2022.

Daniel Walker Appointed clergy

Larry M. Locke Chair, Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC)