

OAKTON UNITED METHODIST CHURCH CHILD PROTECTION POLICY AND PROCEDURES

I. Purpose

Oakton United Methodist Church seeks to establish reasonable procedures to reduce the risk of physical, emotional and sexual abuse of children as they participate in church ministries, and to protect staff and volunteers from false allegations of misconduct.

II. Biblical Foundation

Oakton United Methodist Church seeks to express God's love of young persons and to provide for their personal wholeness. This faith 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 rebuke 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.

"Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled."
Luke 14:21 (NRSV)

In the Parable of the Great Banquet, Jesus reminds us that God is in the business of inviting all people to the table, where they can be nurtured and transformed to be Christ to others. Today, we continue to recognize that each individual is a child of God and must be allowed to live free of fear, surrounded by love. As Christian adults, we must establish and maintain a nurturing, loving, safe and secure Christian environment, providing support and assistance to our children, youth, and at-risk adults, remembering that our mandate is not only a responsibility, but an opportunity to protect the gift that God has bestowed upon us.

"A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."
John 13:34 (NIV)

Blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear.
Matthew 13:16

III. Commonwealth of Virginia Statutes

Under Section 63.2-100 of the Code of Virginia, an abused child is defined as one who is less than eighteen years of age,

1. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care creates or inflicts, threatens to create or inflict, or allows to be created or inflicted upon such child a physical or mental injury by other than accidental means, or creates a substantial risk of death, disfigurement, or impairment of bodily or mental functions, including but not limited to, a child who is with his parent or other person responsible for his care either (i) during the manufacture or attempted manufacture of a Schedule I or II controlled substance, or (ii) during the unlawful sale of such substance by that child's parents or other person responsible for his care, where such manufacture, or attempted manufacture or unlawful sale would constitute a felony violation of § 18.2-248;

2. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care neglects or refuses to provide care necessary for his health. However, no child who in good faith is under treatment solely by spiritual means through prayer in accordance with the tenets and practices of a recognized church or religious denomination shall for that reason alone be considered to be an abused or neglected child;
3. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care abandons such child;
4. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care commits or allows to be committed any act of sexual exploitation or any sexual act upon a child in violation of the law;
5. 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
6. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care creates a substantial risk of physical or mental injury by knowingly leaving the child alone in the same dwelling, including an apartment as defined in § 55-79.2, with a person to whom the child is not related by blood or marriage and who the parent or other person responsible for his care knows has been convicted of an offense against a minor for which registration is required as a violent sexual offender pursuant to § 9.1-902.

An act of child abuse may be committed by any person responsible for the care of another individual who is less than eighteen years of age. It does not matter whether the person caring for the child under the age of 18 (hereinafter referred to as a "Child" or "Children", which term as used in this Policy also includes youth ages 12-18) is a compensated or a volunteer worker. It does not matter whether the person routinely is entrusted with the care of children or whether such individual only occasionally comes in contact with children. It does not matter whether the person was entrusted with the care of a child for an hour or only a moment. It only matters that a child was abused or neglected by the person who, on the occasion in question, was responsible for the child's care.

IV. 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.

V. Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse

In an effort to create the safest possible environment within Oakton United Methodist Church, several abuse prevention measures will be utilized. These measures include screening of paid and volunteer workers for past child abuse convictions or expungements, provision for regular training on child abuse issues to paid and volunteer staff members, use of the two leader rule, standards of appropriate classroom discipline and open classrooms.

1. Six Month Rule

Oakton United Methodist Church will not use anyone as a 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.

2. Staff Screening

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 confirming he/she has never been convicted of child abuse nor had such a conviction expunged. Also, the screening form will ask for the following: general information, criminal convictions, prior church membership, prior church volunteer work, and prior experience with children or youth. Each such person shall also undergo a national 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. Following completion of the application and receipt of the results of the criminal record check, each applicant shall be interviewed by at least two persons, preferably one of each gender.

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 they have read, understand and agree to abide by the policy. Anyone failing to do so will not be permitted to serve until the policy has been read and the form signed. These individuals are also required to attend at least one face-to-face training session, offered by the church, on child protection ideally within 90 days of beginning their service. Thereafter, they may recertify their understanding and compliance with the child protection policy by re-reading the statement and signing the attached form. Leaders of community groups of children or youth who use the church facility, including its outdoor facilities, are also required to read the policy and sign the acknowledgment form. Church facilities, including outdoor facilities, will not be available to groups whose leaders refuse to read and sign the policy.

4. Two Adult Rule

Leaders will be assigned in teams of two or more for all children or youth activities. These two leaders will be unrelated adults age 18 or older and at least 5 years older than the children and youth they are with. If the group is divided, each subgroup will have two leaders. If there are not two leaders available for each group, then groups will be combined with another group to make possible the presence of two leaders or the activity will be canceled on that occasion. Community groups of children or youth who meet at the church must have two or more leaders present who have signed this form. If any group stays overnight at the church, or if a church sponsored group leaves the premises, two or more leaders must be present and must include at least one male and one female not related by marriage, if the group is mixed in gender.

5. Adequate Supervision

Adequate supervision will be provided at all times:

- One adult to three children, zero to twelve months of age.
- One adult to four children, ages twelve to twenty-four months
- One adult to six children, ages twenty-four months to thirty-six months
- One adult to eight children, ages three to eighteen years

The specific needs of individual children may require a change to these guidelines.

6. One-on-One Mentoring or Consultation

Any one-on-one mentoring or consultation between an adult and a child will be conducted in a room or area that is in plain view of others.

7. Classroom Discipline

All leaders and workers with children and youth will use the following discipline measures. If a child is behaving inappropriately, the leader or worker will 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 will 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 Pastor 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.

8. 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.

9. 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.

VI. Reporting Child Abuse

Should there be an allegation of child abuse at Oakton 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 investigation, 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 a 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 VI (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.

VII. Policy Review

The Child Protection Policy and Procedures of Oakton 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.

VIII. Policy Acknowledgement

After reviewing the foregoing Policy and Procedures, please sign, date, and return this page of the policy to indicate that you have read, understand and accept the Child Protection Policy and Procedures of Oakton United Methodist Church.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Phone Number _____

I have read and understand the Child Protection Policy and Procedures of Oakton 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 churches which I might provide to Oakton 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