



Safe Sanctuaries Policy

Updated: September 2017

Introduction

The General Conference of the United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child abuse in the church. The adopted resolution calls all churches to welcome the children and also to make our churches safe places for children to grow and learn. It is our responsibility to be proactive in our recruiting and training to find people with a gift for caring for children and also to protect those volunteers and paid staff from false accusations. It is also our responsibility to oversee all programs involving children to make sure there is a safe environment and to have a plan of response in place should an accusation arise. The General Conference resolution affirmed that every local church shall have in place a policy for protecting children.

Purpose

Villa Rica First United Methodist Church's purpose for establishing this Child Abuse Prevention Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical and mental safety and spiritual growth of all our children and youth.

Statement of Covenant

As a Christian community of faith committed to ministry to and with children, we pledge to conduct all our activities and ministries in such a way that assures the safety and spiritual growth of all children and youth entrusted to us. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers. We will be responsible in overseeing our programs and events and in training our staff so that they are able and equipped to minister to children in Jesus' name. We will report and respond to all suspected incidents of abuse including physical, emotional, neglect, sexual, and ritual abuse, as is required by state law and our moral conscience, and we will be prepared to minister to the families of both the abused and the perpetrator. (See Appendix A for detailed definitions and indicators of abuse).

Definitions: For the purpose of this policy:

- **Nursery:** ages birth to under 3 years of age
- **Child/Children:** children 3 years of age through 5th grade
- **Youth:** 6th through 12th grade
- **Staff:** paid employees cleared to work with all programs serving nursery, children, and youth
- **Volunteer:** an unpaid adult, 18 years of age or older, who meets all required criteria to work with Villa Rica FUMC's programs serving nursery, children, and youth.
- **Floater:** An adult cleared, trained, and approved by the pastor to meet the Two-Adult Rule
- **Direct Supervisory Role:** any adult who is ultimately in charge of an event with children or youth and may include paid staff and/or volunteers

Procedures: We adopt these minimum standards for our ministries with children and youth.

- I. Screening and Recruiting of staff and adult volunteers will include the following:**
- a. Complete an application listing standard contact information, their gifts for that ministry, and 3 unrelated personal references.
 - b. Attend the prescribed Safe Sanctuary Training and sign the Safe Sanctuary Covenant.
 - c. Be cleared by the pastor or education chair before they begin teaching. If needed, references will be contacted.
 - d. Demonstrate an active membership with Villa Rica FUMC for at least 6 months before being allowed to supervise nursery, children, or youth.
 - e. All staff and adult volunteers will complete Criminal Background Checks and Child Abuse History Clearance. These will be viewed by the pastor only.
 - f. All forms and reference reports shall be kept as a part of an applicant's confidential personnel file. All forms shall be kept in a locked file in the church office.
 - g. Safe Sanctuary Training and Criminal Background Checks shall be renewed every year.
 - h. All staff that supervise nursery, children, and youth and direct supervisors of events with nursery, children, and youth are required to have current First Aid and CPR/AED training. It is highly recommended that all other volunteers undergo First Aid and CPR/AED training as well.
- II. Supervision**
- a. "Two-Adult Rule"
 - i. There will be two unrelated adults present at all times during any church sponsored program, event, or ministry involving nursery, children, and youth. In some circumstances a "floater" who moves amid the classrooms during the program period can fulfill this rule.
 - ii. No person under 18 shall be considered as one of the two adults.
 - b. Youth under 18 years of age may serve as assistants if two other adult supervisors are present in the area during the activity. They must be under the direct supervision of an approved staff or adult volunteer.
 - c. No person shall supervise an age group unless he/she is at least 5 years older than the oldest student.
 - d. Each door will have a window or the door will be left open at all times.
 - e. Children and youth should never be allowed to roam the buildings or grounds unsupervised.
- III. Registration Materials and Attendance Records**
- a. Registration materials for activities in which nursery, children, and youth are outside direct supervision of their parents/guardians shall require signed written permission forms that include emergency contact information and pertinent health/allergy information in order to participate.
 - b. Copies of registration materials shall be kept in the church office as well as within the nursery for nursery aged children.
 - c. If the participants are old enough to understand, based on their teacher's discretion, they shall sign a covenant of participation listing rules for all trips, overnights, etc.
 - d. Rosters of those in attendance at any nursery, children, or youth activity should be maintained as well as staff and volunteers present.

IV. Off-Site and Overnight Activities

- a. Adult chaperones for trips off church property or overnight are required in a ratio of two adults for the first 10 participants and an additional adult for every 10 participants.
- b. For mixed gendered trips, at least one unrelated male and female chaperone will be required.
- c. On overnight trips, adult chaperones are required to be housed in the immediate area with the children/youth under their supervision. Hotels should be avoided.
- d. Written Parental Permission Form must be on file and accompany each participant and include parental signature, emergency contact information, and pertinent health/allergy information.

V. Transportation Guidelines

- a. Drivers must be at least 21 years of age.
- b. Criminal Background Checks for drivers are to include a Background Check of Driving Record only to be viewed by the pastor.
- c. Approved restraints or seat belts for all children/youth must be used when available in vehicles.

VI. First Aid

- a. First Aid Kits as well as access to an AED will be available at all events involving nursery, children, and youth.
- b. Locations of First Aid Kits include the kitchen, office, church bus, sacristy, and JAM room, and the AED is located in the family entrance lobby.
- c. For events that take place off campus a well-stocked First Aid Kit should be present and easily accessible.
- d. Trustees are responsible for keeping the First Aid Kit stocked.

VII. Procedures for Reporting Alleged Abuse

- a. Should a staff member or volunteer suspect abuse, or a child or youth report abuse by any member of the church staff, volunteer, or employed staff, or by any person present at a church-sponsored meeting or activity, or if a staff or volunteer suspects, or a child/youth reports abuse occurring away from church-sponsored functions, the following procedures shall apply for reporting the alleged abuse:
 - i. All staff and volunteers serving with nursery, children, and youth at Villa Rica FUMC are considered to be mandated reporters. A mandated reporter who has reasonable cause to believe a child has been abused must report the situation to the proper authority immediately (no later than 24 hours following the time the abuse is suspected) and is subject to criminal penalty upon failing to do so.
 1. The mandated reporter should contact the pastor immediately. If the pastor is not immediately available, the mandated reporter should contact the Student Ministry Coordinator. If the pastor is the accused party, notify the Chairperson of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) or the District Superintendent.
 2. The mandated reporter contacts DFCS (Department of Family and Child Services) to report the incident (Carroll County DFCS 770-830-2166). If protective services are deemed necessary the Carroll County Sheriff's Office should be contacted immediately (Carroll County Sheriff's Office 770-830-5888).

3. The mandated reporter should document the incident in writing. If at all possible, the attached form, "Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse", should be used. Documentation shall be signed and dated.
4. Once an accusation occurs, the pastor or SPRC Chairperson shall notify the following:
 - a. District Superintendent
 - b. Chairperson of the Villa Rica FUMC Trustees, who shall notify the Church insurance carrier
5. If the incident occurred at a church related activity, the accused shall immediately be removed from contact with children until the incident reported has been resolved. This should be handled in a discreet manner, and they shall not be banned from other church ministries.

VIII. Response to Abuse

- a. If allegations of abuse are made, our response will be guided by the following principles:
 - i. All allegations will be taken seriously.
 - ii. Respect for privacy and confidentiality will be maintained.
 - iii. Victims include the abused, the family of the abused, the peers of the abused, the family of the accused, and the congregation.
 - iv. The needs of the victims will be given high priority.
 - v. Full cooperation will be given to civil authorities.
 - vi. Pastoral support will be available to all persons involved in the incident as indicated.
 - vii. The District Superintendent of the Rome Carrollton District of the United Methodist Church or a media director appointed by the District of North Georgia Conference will be the only person(s) authorized to make statements to representatives of the media. All requests for statements should be directed to the church's pastor.

Pastor _____ Date _____

Administrative Council Chair _____ Date _____

Lay Leader _____ Date _____

Trustees' Chair _____ Date _____

Student Ministries Coordinator _____ Date _____

Appendix A

Information obtained from *Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth* by Joy Thornburg Melton

Types of Child Abuse

Generally, child abuse is characterized in five primary forms: physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and ritual abuse.

I. Physical Abuse

Abuse in which a person deliberately and intentionally causes bodily harm to a child. Examples may include violent battery with a weapon (knife, belt, strap, and so forth), burning, shaking, kicking, choking, fracturing bones, and any of a wide variety of non-accidental injuries to a child's body.

II. Emotional Abuse

Abuse in which a person exposes a child to spoken and/or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty. Emotional abuse sends a message to the child of worthlessness, badness, and being not only unloved but undeserving of love and care. Children exposed to emotional abuse may have experienced being locked in a closet, being deprived of any sign of parental affection, being constantly told they are bad or stupid, or being allowed or forced to abuse alcohol or drugs. Emotional abuse is often very difficult to prove and is devastating to the victim.

III. Neglect

Abuse in which a person endangers a child's health, safety, or welfare through negligence. Neglect may include withholding food, clothing, medical care, education, and even affection and affirmation of the child's self-worth. This is perhaps the most common form of abuse.

IV. Sexual Abuse

Abuse in which sexual contact between a child and an adult (or another older and more powerful youth) occurs. The child is never truly capable of consenting to or resisting such contact and/or such sexual acts. Often, the child is physically and psychologically dependent upon the perpetrator of the abuse. Examples of sexual abuse may include fondling, intercourse, incest, and the exploitation of and exposure to child pornography or prostitution.

V. Ritual Abuse

Abuse in which physical, sexual, or psychological violations of a child are inflicted regularly, intentionally, and in a stylized way by a person or persons responsible for the child's welfare. The abuser may appeal to some higher authority or power to justify the abuse. The abuse may include cruel treatment of animals or repeated threats of harm to the child, other persons, and animals. Reports of ritual abuse are often extremely horrifying and may seem to grim to be true. Children making such reports must not be ignored.

Indicators of Child Abuse

Children suffering abuse often will not tell anyone about it. Therefore, it is important to be able to recognize other signs of abuse. The following characteristics may be indicators of abuse, although they are not necessarily proof. Individually, any one of the indicators may be signs or a number of other more or less serious problems. When these indicators are observed in a child, they can be considered as warnings and lead you to look into the situation further.

Possible Signs of Physical Abuse

1. Hostile and aggressive behavior toward others
2. Fearfulness of parents and/or other adults
3. Destructive behavior toward self, others, and/or property
4. Inexplicable fractures or bruises inappropriate for child's developmental stage
5. Burns, facial injuries, pattern of repetitious bruises

Possible Signs of Emotional Abuse

1. Exhibits severe depression and/or withdrawal
2. Exhibits severe lack of self-esteem
3. Failure to thrive
4. Threatens or attempts suicide
5. Speech and/or eating disorders
6. Goes to extremes to seek adult approval
7. Extreme passive/aggressive behavior patterns

Possible Signs of Neglect

1. Failure to thrive
2. Pattern of inappropriate dress for climate
3. Beggars or steals food; chronic hunger
4. Depression
5. Untreated medical conditions
6. Poor hygiene

Possible Signs of Sexual Abuse

1. Unusually advanced sexual knowledge and/or behavior for child's age and developmental stage
2. Depression-cries often for no apparent reason
3. Promiscuous behavior
4. Runs away from home and refuses to return
5. Difficulty walking or sitting
6. Bruised/bleeding in vaginal or anal areas
7. Exhibits frequent headaches, stomach aches, extreme fatigue
8. Sexually transmitted diseases

In addition to these indicators, children who have been sexually abused at church may exhibit some of the following:

1. Unusual nervousness or anxiety about being left in the nursery or Sunday school class
2. Reluctance to participate in church activities that were previously enthusiastically approached
3. Comments such as "I don't want to be alone with _____" in reference to a childcare worker or Sunday school teacher.
4. Nightmares including a childcare worker or teacher as a frightening character
5. Unexplained hostility toward a childcare worker or teacher

Possible Signs of Ritual Abuse

1. Disruptions of memory or consciousness
2. Unexplained mistrust and mood swings
3. Flashbacks
4. Eating disorders
5. Fear of the dark, especially at sundown or a full moon
6. Agitation or despair that seems to occur in cycles
7. Fear of ministers, priests, or others wearing robes or uniforms
8. Nightmares or sleep disorders
9. Any of the symptoms of sexual abuse

Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse

1. Name of worker (staff/volunteer) observing or receiving disclosure of abuse:

2. Child's /youth's name: _____

3. Child's/youth's age/date of birth: _____

4. Date and place of initial conversation with/report from child/youth: _____

5. Child's/Youth's statement (give detailed account, use additional sheets as necessary):

6. Name of person accused of abuse: _____

7. Relationship of accused to child/youth (VRFUMC Staff, VRFUMC Volunteer, family member, other): _____

8. Incident reported to pastor/chair of SPRC (date/time): _____

9. Summary of conversation with pastor/ chair of SPRC: _____

10. Date/Time of call to child's/youth's parent or guardian: _____

11. Person spoken to: _____

12. Summary of conversation: _____

Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse Cont.

13. Date/Time of call to GA Department of Family and Children’s Services (Carroll County DFCS 770-830-2166) or Carroll County Sheriff’s Office 770-830-5888:

14. Person spoken to: _____

15. Summary of conversation: _____

16. Other contacts (Name, Date, and Time) (Use additional sheets as necessary): _____

17. Summary of conversation: _____

Signature of Person Making Report

Printed Name of Person Making Report

Date of Report