

Colonial Heights United Methodist Church
631 Lebanon Road, Kingsport, TN
Safe Sanctuary Policy
(Revised January 2020)

Introduction:

The General Conference of the United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of children and youth sexual abuse in the church. The adopted resolution includes the following statement:

Jesus said, “whoever welcomes [a] child... welcomes me” (Matthew 18:5). Children are our present and our future, our hope, our teachers, our inspiration. They are full participants in the life of the church and in the realm of God.

Jesus also said, “If anyone 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” (Matthew 18:6). Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to the little ones from economic, physical, emotional, and sexual exploitation and abuse” (Para. 162c).

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children, Child sexual abuse, exploitation, and ritual abuse [“ritual abuse” refers to abusive acts committed as part of ceremonies or rites: ritual abusers are often related to cults, or pretend to be] occur in churches, large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural, and racial lines. It is real, and it appears to be increasing. Most annual conferences can cite specific incidents of child sexual abuse and exploitation within churches. Virtually every congregation has among its members adult survivors of early sexual trauma.

Such incidents are devastating to all who are involved: the child, the family, the local church and its leaders. Increasingly, churches are torn apart by the legal, emotional, and monetary consequences of litigation following allegations of abuse.

God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from sexual and ritual abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults grow safe and strong. (*The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church 2000*, 180-181)

Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, Colonial Heights United Methodist Church in Kingsport, TN, adopts this policy for the prevention of children and youth abuse in our church.

Purpose:

Our congregation’s purpose for establishing these Children and Youth Abuse Prevention Guidelines and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all our children and youth.

Statement of Covenant:

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all our children and youth as well as all of the workers with children and youth. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; we will implement prudent operational guidelines in all programs and events; we will educate all of our workers with children and youth regarding the use of all appropriate guidelines and methods (including first aid and methods of discipline); we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law; and we will be prepared to respond to media inquires if an incident occurs.

Conclusion:

In all of our ministries with children and youth, Colonial Heights United Methodist Church is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child and/or youth will be “surrounded by steadfast love... established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal” (“Baptismal Covenant II,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 44).

Implementation:

This revised policy shall replace the Children and Youth Abuse Prevention Guidelines that were adopted July 25, 2004, in a duly authorized Church Council meeting of the Colonial Heights United Methodist Church, Kingsport, TN, by a vote of 13 for, 0 against, and 0 abstained, immediately upon approval by the Church Council.

It is recommended that these policies be made readily available on the church web site and that a printed copy be furnished upon request. It is further recommended that the Church Council, or other church governing body at the time, review these policies at least quadrennially.

Revised by Margaret Frazier, Director of Youth Ministries, January 2020.

Approved by Church Council, _____.

Recording Secretary

Church Council, Chair

Trustees', Chair

Pastor

Child/Youth Abuse Prevention Guidelines

These Children and Youth Abuse Prevention Guidelines apply to all ministries of the church, with the understanding that the affiliate ministries will have additional policies that can add to, but not detract from, our guidelines.

In an emergency situation where health and/or safety are at risk, a call should immediately be placed to 911 Emergency services.

1. Definitions

1. Child/Youth Physical and Emotional Abuse

1. **Actions of physical affection** toward children and youth shall be in the light and in the presence of others, never in the dark and when alone.
 1. Using good judgment, appropriate touching includes:
 1. brief hugs or handshakes of greeting, congratulations, encouragement, or consolation
 2. walking hand in hand
 3. assuring pats on the back
 4. an arm around the shoulder.
 2. All other forms of touching are to be avoided. **Any touching that involves even the slightest possible sexual connotation is forbidden.**
 3. **Touching in anger, disgust, or aggression is forbidden.**
 1. No corporal punishment of any child associated with any church program is allowed. "Corporal punishment" means any conduct which would cause any degree of physical pain or discomfort to a child.
 2. No threatening, menacing, or verbally degrading actions or words are allowed— this includes tone, words, and actions used in such a way as to cause a reasonable apprehension of physical pain, discomfort, or mental/emotional anguish on the part of the child.
 4. It is recognized that the physical and emotional needs of infants and toddlers require more touching and holding than would be appropriate for older children and youth.
 5. Adults, supervisors, and counselors shall intervene when inappropriate physical activity occurs among children, youth, and adults.
2. If a child is behaving in such a way as to present a threat to his/her own physical safety or the safety of others, the child should be safely restrained and the adult(s) responsible for the child is to be notified as soon as practicable and the child removed from the program as soon as practicable until such a time as the child no longer poses a threat to safety. Any costs, such as transportation or special custodial costs, incurred as a result of removing a child from a program are the responsibility of the child's parent(s) or responsible adult(s).

2. Child/Youth Sexual Abuse

1. **"Child sexual abuse"** is any act which involves any kind of physical contact with or visible exposure of genitals, genital area, or breasts of a child or an adult interacting with a child, or any depiction of same. This provision does not apply to reasonable and necessary changing of diapers or toilet training of a young child. "Child sexual abuse" also includes any conduct intended to cause sexual arousal in or in the presence of a child.
2. **No sexual abuse of any child/youth is to be permitted or tolerated.**
3. **Signs of Sexual Abuse include:**
 1. Physical signs though not common may include bruising, bleeding, redness and bumps, or scabs around the mouth, genitals, or anus. Urinary tract infections, and sexually transmitted diseases.
 2. Anxiety, chronic stomach pain, or headaches may occur.
 3. Emotional and behavioral signs are more common and include "too perfect" behavior, withdrawal, fear, depression, unexplained anger, and rebellion.
 4. Nightmares, failing grades, cruelty to animals, bullying, self-harm, and alcohol or drug use.

2. Prevention Guidelines:

1. **Two Adult Rule:** Two adults are to be utilized in all programming, event, or ministry with children and youth. If the two adults cannot attend, the event must be canceled. This adult could be a floater with physical and visual access to all areas as unrestricted as possible (doors and curtains opened...)
 1. If the two adults are related by blood or marriage, an unrelated third adult shall be present.
 2. No person under the age of 18 may serve as one of the adults under this rule. Additionally, each adult must be at least 4 years older than the children or youth they are working with.
 3. If a group of children or youth consists of one gender only (i.e. all youth or children are female), at least one adult of that gender must be present.
 4. When transporting children or youth, staff and volunteers will make reasonable efforts to maintain the two-person rule, as described above, or to have more than one child or youth in the vehicle. When it is impractical to have two adults present the adult should seek parental permission to transport the child or youth. All drivers must be 21 years or older.
 5. Confidential counseling between a staff person or volunteer and a child or youth will not occur behind a closed door. During such counseling sessions another adult will be present, in the room or in an adjacent room, who is aware that a counseling session is in progress and who could hear and respond in the event of an outcry. If another adult is not continuously present as described above, the counseling session must occur in a public place, such a table at a local coffee shop or restaurant, where sufficient confidentiality can be maintained while keeping the session in constant public view.
 6. It shall be the responsibility of the staff person or lay volunteer to maintaining the Two Person Rule.
2. **Overnight Compliance:** Written parental permission shall be obtained when groups of children or youth leave church property. Such permissions shall include space for the parent or guardian to furnish information concerning allergies or other special needs. It is the obligation of the parent or guardian to provide the church with the complete and accurate information concerning the child's allergies, medical conditions, or special needs. It is also imperative that the parent or guardian furnish the church with accurate, up-to-date emergency contact information.
 1. It is preferred that no adult room with any youth or child (other than his or her own) in a hotel, cabin, tent, or other similar situation. If such rooming is necessary because of limited space, an adult may not sleep in the same bed as a youth or child, and at least three youth must be sleeping in the room.
 2. All accommodations must be separated by gender.
3. **Cyber Communication** (Internet, texting, cell phone conversations and all social media communication) is inevitably used in ministry. It is the intent of our policy to maintain an appropriate balance between using new communication tools and keeping people safe. The following guidelines apply to all cyber communication:
 1. Parental permission is required for adult staff or volunteers to communicate with youth or children via any of the cyber communication modes listed above.
 2. A media release form must be completed annually for all children and youth participating in Colonial Heights United Methodist Church ministries.
 3. Staff and volunteers should use best judgement when communicating with children or youth by cell phone conversation or text message. Adults should keep these interactions brief and work to move them into a public space or group conversation whenever possible.
 4. All ministries related communications between adults and youth on social media are encouraged to happen in public space to ensure openness and transparency.
3. **Staff and Volunteer Selection and Screening.**
 1. **Staff Members:** Any paid employee (clergy or lay) of Colonial Heights United Methodist Church must fill out an authorization form and then be subjected to a national criminal record check at time of employment. We are screening for offenses that pose a risk to the health and safety of others only. Staff members already employed at the time these guidelines are adopted must also fill out an authorization form and then be subjected to a background check.
 1. First Aid/CPR Training is offered annually for all church workers who work with children and youth. Employed workers are encouraged to take this course and keep their certification up to date.
 2. Paid staff must complete a training session that includes information on the prevention, procedures, and reporting of suspected abuse the next time it is offered after employment and each year

thereafter. Colonial Heights United Methodist Church offers Safe Sanctuary Training biannually (January and June).

2. **Volunteers:** Any person wishing to volunteer with children or youth must have been an active participant of the congregation for 1 year before being allowed to serve in ministries with children and youth.
 1. Persons who have been an active participant of the congregation for 6 months may volunteer with children and youth, but must first provide 2 references. These references may be oral or in writing.
 2. All volunteers working with children or youth on a continuing basis shall:
 1. Complete a Volunteer Children and Youth Workers Profile form
 2. Complete a training session that includes information on the prevention, procedures, and reporting of suspected abuse the next time it is offered after becoming a volunteer. Colonial Heights United Methodist Church offers Safe Sanctuary Training biannually (January and June).
Safe Sanctuary training must be renewed annually to maintain volunteer status with Colonial Heights United Methodist Church.
 3. All volunteers working with children or youth who chaperone overnight trips shall complete consent for a national criminal record check (paid for by the church). We are screening for offenses that pose a risk to the health and safety of others only.
 4. Documentation of background checks and training will be kept confidential and supervised by the the Director of Youth Ministries or their representative.
 5. Staff or volunteers may not be supervised by a parent, spouse, sibling, or other close relative.

4. Reporting Procedures

1. **Legal requirements:** Volunteers and staff who work with children under the age of 18 must report any type of suspected abuse to the proper authorities. Any volunteer who makes such a report in good faith is given qualified protection for liability and failure to make such a report can give rise to criminal and/or civil liability. Good faith reports may be made anonymously, but it is preferred that the reporting person leave name and number in case more information is needed.
2. If an incident of child physical or sexual abuse occurs or is suspected of having occurred, both the church staff member/volunteer in charge of the program and the church pastor or pastor-on-call are to be notified immediately.
 1. The pastor or the pastor's designee(s) will immediately investigate any report of actual or suspected child physical or sexual abuse, and if there are reasonable grounds to believe that an act of abuse may have occurred, the pastor or the pastor's designee will notify the Tennessee Department of Children's Services (DCS) 24-hour Child Abuse Hotline at 1-877-237-0004 or the county child protective unit no more than 24 hours after receiving the report. A written report of any such internal inquiry will be prepared as soon as practicable.
3. If it is impracticable to notify the staff member/volunteer and pastor, and imminent danger of the child is suspected, then the Tennessee Department of Children's Services (DCS) 24-hour Child Abuse Hotline at 1-877-237-0004 will be called immediately by the reporting adult.
4. All incidents and suspected abuse will be documented and confidentially kept on file in the church office.
5. In the event that a child or youth discloses abuse, all Colonial Height United Methodist Church staff and volunteers will seek to respond with due diligence in reporting and compassion in receiving such a disclosure. Proper behavior in such a situation includes:
 1. telling the child you believe him or her;
 2. praising the child for their courage to report abuse;
 3. listening attentively; and
 4. refraining from asking too many or leading questions.