



**Child and Youth Protection Policy
Culpeper United Methodist Church
Culpeper, Virginia**

I. Mission

Culpeper United Methodist Church strives to provide a safe spiritual home in which each person comes to know Christ personally. It is through the joy of the Lord that each child develops a strong Christian foundation that inspires life-long growth with Christ and a strong relationship with the church.

II. Purpose

The purpose of the Culpeper United Methodist Church (hereafter referred to as CUMC) Child and Youth Protection Policy is to:

- A. Provide a caring and secure environment for the children and youth of our community in all activities sponsored by CUMC or outside group, including but not limited to; Sunday school, youth programs, scouts, choirs, nursery, Wednesday night activities, MOPS, home school groups, CUMC Children and Youth Mission trips, Vacation Bible School.
- B. Establish reasonable guidelines and procedures for the early detection of instances of suspected abuse or neglect.
- C. Protect our Church, paid staff and volunteers at CUMC against false allegations of misconduct, abuse or neglect.
- D. To be in compliance with Virginia State Law on child abuse and the Virginia United Methodist Conference Child and Youth Protection Guidelines.

III. Biblical Foundation

CUMC seeks to express God's love for all persons and to provide for the personal wholeness of all who gather within its congregation and facilities. This caring community seeks to prevent abuse in any form and to be in ministry to victims of abuse and to their families and to the alleged abuser and family. This congregation is especially mindful of its responsibility to the children and youth committed to its care. The Bible is basic to our understanding and upon it all policies, procedures, and ministries must stand.

And Jesus said to them, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them; for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it."

Mark 10:14-15 (NIV)

Jesus teaches us explicitly that children have the right and the keys to the Kingdom of God. Our goal in response to the Biblical mandate is to maintain a safe, secure, and loving place where children may grow spiritually and emotionally and where care givers, teachers and leaders, paid staff and volunteer, minister appropriately to their needs.

IV. Virginia's Child Abuse Laws

Under Virginia law Section 63.2-100 of the Code of Virginia, ... an abused child is defined as one who is less than eighteen years of age, whose parents or other person responsible for his/her care: ...

- A. Causes or inflicts, threatens to cause a non-accidental physical or mental injury, including 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, manufacture or attempt to manufacture of a Schedule I or II controlled substance or (ii) during the unlawful sale of such substance by that child's parent or other person responsible for his/her care, where such manufacture or attempt to manufacture or unlawful sale would constitute a felony violation of § 18.2-248.
- B. Neglects or refuses to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, emotional, nurturing, or health care.
- C. Abandons the child.
- D. Fails to provide adequate supervision in relation to the child's age and level of development.
- E. Commits or allows to be committed any illegal sexual act upon a child including incest, rape, fondling, indecent exposure, prostitution, or allows a child to be used in any sexually explicit visual material.
- F. Knowingly leaves a child alone in the same dwelling with a person who is not related to the child by blood or marriage and who is required to register as a violent sexual offender pursuant to §9.1-902.

Section 63.2-1509 of the Code of Virginia, states that... 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 planned 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 Child Protection Services.

See Section VIII. CUMC Reporting Procedures

In Section 63.2-1512 of the Code of Virginia, states that any person making a report/complaint of child abuse or neglect shall be immune from civil or criminal liability unless that person acted in bad faith or with malicious intent.

V. Child Abuse

A. Definition

Child abuse refers to an act committed by a parent, caregiver 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, poisonings, sprains, dislocations, gunshot, or stabbing wounds.
- 2. Physical Neglect** - The failure to provide food, clothing, shelter or supervision for a child and 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, a person knowingly leaves a child in the care of a person, not related by blood or marriage, who is required to register as a violent sex offender.
- 3. 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** – The refusal or failure by a caretaker to obtain and/or follow through with a complete regiment 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 that 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. This would also include bizarre discipline.
7. **Bizarre Discipline** – Eccentric, irrational or grossly inappropriate procedures or devices to modify the child’s behavior.

VI. **Specific Guidelines for a Safe Environment**

In an effort to create the safest possible environment CUMC will implement and utilize the following preventative measures:

A. **Six Month Rule**

- In general, volunteers will have been a member/active congregant for six months at CUMC prior to being assigned into a leadership position with children or youth.
- If an exception to this rule appears to be in the best interest of CUMC, then approval of the Lead Pastor is required.
- Program leaders will attempt to pair all new volunteer workers who have been with CUMC less than six months with another volunteer who has been with the congregation for at least one year and who has a prior relationship with the children and youth.

B. **Screening, Background Checks and Training of Staff, Volunteer and Youth Workers**

1. Prior to working with children and youth at CUMC for any duration of time all volunteers and staff must:
 - a) Receive a copy of the Child and Youth Protection Policy and Procedures.
 - b) Complete and sign the “Information Form and Agreement for Workers in Children’s and Youth Ministries,” which includes the “Background Check Disclosure and Authorization Form”.
2. All volunteers and staff, within their first 90 days of working with children or youth, must attend a training session on the Child and Youth Protection Policy.
 - a) Child and Youth Protection Policy training will be offered at least four times each year and on a as needs basis.
 - b) All volunteers must renew their training every three years, and when significant changes are made to the policy.

- c) Although it is CUMC's goal to have every volunteer screened and trained before they work as a Child Care provider, we recognize that in some circumstances it may not be feasible. A volunteer who has not gone through a background check or the Child and Youth Protection Policy training, may help in a room where there is a certified volunteer or Nursery Teacher.
- This is only on a case by case basis and must be approved by either the Children's Ministry Director or the Nursery Coordinator.
 - This exception for a non-screened and trained volunteer can only be permitted Two (2) times within a Three (3) month period.

3. Youth helping in Children's Ministry Area

- a) Youth that help with Children's Ministry to include: Sunday Mornings, VBS or other Special Children Events, must be in grades 6th through 12th.
- b) If a youth helper is 18 years of age, they must have a background check done.
- c) An abbreviated Child and Youth Protection Policy training for youth helpers is required and will be scheduled by the Children's Ministry Director.

Sections from the current Child and Youth Protection Policy to be trained are: Child Abuse, Specific Guidelines for a Safe Environment, Physical Contact, "Five Years Older" Rule, Classroom and Event Discipline, Open Classrooms and Classroom and Event Release Procedures.

4. The Children's Ministry Director or Director of Youth Ministry will submit the volunteer's information to a private organization to be processed through a secure website. After completed background check for the volunteer is received, Children's Ministry Director will manage all aspects of their Information Form and any other documentation pertaining to the volunteer.

Note: The Office Manager will run background checks for all employees of CUMC when they are hired and maintain the results.

- a) CUMC will cover the cost of the individual's background check, only if the background check was done for a CUMC ministry program.

Note: If an outside group needs background checks done, they will be responsible for payment before background check is submitted.

- b) *A background check must be run again once the original report is three years old and every three years thereafter, as long as the volunteer or staff worker continues to work with children or youth.*

5. Persons with a child abuse conviction, violent crime conviction or refusing to sign the "Information & Agreement Form" will not be permitted to work with children or youth.
 - a) Persons with substance abuse convictions or any other prior convictions not including violent crimes or child abuse will be reviewed on a case by case basis. The final decision will be left to the discretion of the Lead Pastor.

6. Record Retention
 - a) The Children's Ministry Director is responsible for maintaining all Child and Youth Volunteer's Information & Agreement Form and Background checks in a locked file cabinet in the Children's Ministry Director's office.
 - b) Any Child or Youth Volunteer's expired Information & Agreement Form, Driver's License and Background report, must be shredded.

7. Physical Contact

As part of the healthy relationships that often form between leaders, children or youth with whom they are in ministry, CUMC encourages friendly and caring contact as is appropriate to the relationship of a teacher/leader and ministry participant.

 - a) Both Children and Youth Ministry:
 - 1) Side-hugs and space-hugs, an arm around the shoulder in a difficult time or hands held in prayer are all excellent examples of appropriate physical contact within this "community of love and forgiveness" that we have promised to create within our church.
 - 2) Full-physical contact is never appropriate, and absolutely no contact with anyone's "swimsuit area" should ever take place.
 - b) Children Ministry Only:
 - 1) Physical contact is valuable to children. Let the child lead in showing you what kind of touch is acceptable to him or her.
 - 2) Be aware that a child may be uncomfortable saying no to an adult. Read the child's body language to gauge the child's comfort level.
 - 3) A child's need for physical contact varies individually. Get to know the child and determine what kind of touch is appropriate.

- c) Youth Ministry Only:
 - 1) A good guideline is to never initiate a hug and always be the one to end the hug.
 - 2) Whenever a question arises about where to draw appropriate interpersonal boundaries, remember that you are the adult and it is your responsibility to behave professionally.
- d) Nursery - Babies and Toddlers:

Physical contact with babies and toddlers, including diapering practices, is covered under the Nursery Policy, and while some aspects of physical contact with this age group are different, the principle remains that we are seeking to be faithful to our promises to provide a place of safety, health and help to all people.

8. Social Media and Texting

In many ways, social media and texting can enhance relational ministry and allow leaders to be a part of a person's life in a unique way. However, leaders need to be savvy enough to set up appropriate privacy barriers for themselves, to know what should and **should not** be shared with those in their ministry area and to know how to interact appropriately as a trustworthy mentor in faith.

- a) All leaders connecting with teenage members of their ministry area should inform and seek the guidance of the Director of Youth Ministry.
- b) Directors of Children and Youth ministry will conduct training as needed and make guidelines available to leaders.

9. Qualifications for Leadership

Leaders not conducting themselves appropriately in their mentoring, discipline, physical conduct, social media connections and texting with children or youth in their ministry area may be removed from their leadership role at the discretion of the Director of the relevant ministry area and/or the Lead Pastor.

C. Outside Groups Using the Church Facility

- 1. Outside groups working with children and youth, must comply with this policy to use the CUMC facility.
- 2. All outside groups will be given copies of the Facilities Use Guidelines and the Child and Youth Protection Policy and Procedures.
- 3. All Outside Groups must comply with this policy or loss of future use of the CUMC facilities may result.

D. Two Adult Rule

1. For all church sponsored activities involving children, birth through 5th grade, two unrelated adults must be present, whether the activity is on or off Church premises.
2. For every Church sponsored activity for children in grades 6-12, there must be at least two unrelated adults present. Group size may dictate additional supervision to maintain an appropriate ratio of adults to children.
3. If there **are not** two leaders available for each group, the groups may still meet with the presence of a traveling adult monitor.
4. If the group is of mixed gender and stays overnight at the church or leaves the church premises, there must be two or more unrelated leaders present, with at least one male and one female.
5. Married couples will be considered one person for purposes of this policy.

E. One-on-One Mentoring

1. One-on-one meetings of a child/youth with a staff member must take place in a clearly observable room or area.
2. When privacy concerns require a set-apart space, such conversation still need to take place in a room with a window to the hallway or with the door open. The adult leader should make sure that another adult leader knows about the conversation.
3. One-on-one meetings with a church volunteer may occur only with the prior written consent of the child/youth's parent/guardian and must also occur in a clearly observable room or area.

F. "Five Years Older" Rule

All workers, including volunteers, should be at least five years older than the children with whom they are working. And, workers under age 18 must be required to work with and report to an unrelated adult.

G. Adequate Supervision – Adult to Child Ratios

Note: The ratio of the room is based on the youngest child present.

- 1) Adequate supervision to be provided at all times.
 - Birth to 2 years old – Two (2) Adults for every Four (4) children
 - 3 years to 5 years old – One (1) Adult for every Six (6) children
 - 6 years to 10 years old - One (1) Adult to Ten (10) children
 - 11 years to 18 years old - One (1) Adult to Fifteen (15) children
- 2) VBS and Special Events
 - Preschool – One (1) Adult and Two (2) Youth for every Eight (8) children

- Grades 1 through 3 – One (1) Adult and Two (2) Youth for every Ten (10) children
- Grades 4 through 5 – One (1)Adult and (2) Two Youth for every 15 children

Goals for Adult to Child Ratios – CUMC has a goal of maintaining the above ratios and we recognize that in some circumstances achieving these ratios may not be feasible, such as when an unexpected number of children show up for an event.

H. Classroom and Event Discipline

CUMC ascribes to a positive approach to discipline.

1. If a child is behaving inappropriately, the teacher or worker will state the expected behavior and tell the child specifically what he/she is doing that is not acceptable.
2. If inappropriate behavior continues, the child may be placed at a table to work alone.
3. If the disruptive behavior continues, the child will be taken to the Director of the ministry, or a Pastor, for discussion and time to refocus.
4. If necessary the child's parents will be asked to come and get the child.
5. If removal from the program becomes necessary, the situation will be discussed with the child's parent/guardian as soon as possible to establish the changes that must be made for continued participation in the program.

Note: Absolutely no physical punishment or verbal abuse, including ridicule or sarcasm is to be used at any time. Leaders will model Christian behavior in demonstrating kindness, patience, self-control and in maintaining high expectations that those whom they lead will likewise strive to live by these behaviors in age-appropriate ways.

I. Open Classrooms

The interior of the classrooms shall remain visible from outside of the room at all times. Classrooms and childcare rooms will be visited without prior notice by church staff, parents, and/or other volunteer church workers for observation.

J. Off-Site Activities and Transportation

1. For any church sponsored event that a child/youth will be off church property, a Parental Permission form including emergency contact information, pertinent medical history and insurance information, must be completed for each child/youth. The Parental Permission form must

be in the hands of the staff member or volunteer chaperoning the child/youth.

2. Driving Trips, Overnight Retreats and Mission Trips Guidelines

a) Driving Trips

- When children or youth are being transported to an event, the staff person or adult leader is expected to travel as a part of the group.
- When only one vehicle is being used to transport children, two adults must be in the vehicle. However, if more than one vehicle is used, they must travel together, and only one adult is required in each vehicle.
- Youth **are not** to drive other youth or child to an off-site event except when the other youth or child is a sibling.
- For all off-site overnight activities, a roster of the children or youth participating in the activity must be given to the church office prior to the event.
- A Parental Permission form for each child or youth must be in the vehicle in which the participant is being transported.
- All vehicles must be insured for not less than the legally required minimum limits and have a current registration and inspection sticker.
- The adult volunteer driver must have a current driver's license and must be appropriate for the vehicle they are driving. (For example, they must have a CDL license if driving the CUMC church bus.)
A copy of current license to be included with their Information & Agreement Form.
- The adult volunteer driver must have a driving record search done through CUMC's reporting agency if the adult is transporting children other than their own.
- The driving record of the adult volunteer driver must be in good standing with the DMV.
 - i. The DMV driving record must not contain more than Six (6) negative points within Twelve (12) months nor Nine (9) negative points within Twenty-four (24) month period.
 - ii. No driver whose DMV record reflects a conviction of reckless driving, aggressive driving, driving under the influence of intoxicants or any felony driving offense shall be permitted to transport children other than their own children.

b) Overnight Retreats and Mission Trips

- For all off-site overnight activities, a roster of the children or youth participating in the activity must be given to the Church office prior to the event.
- Mixed-gender groups of participants, both male and female chaperones will be present with the group or at the event. Single gender groups may have chaperons of only their gender.
- Sleeping arrangement will be set clearly to ensure privacy, supervision and appropriate gender/age segregation.

K. Classroom and Event Release Procedures

1. Elementary children in the 5th grade and under will not be released to the building-at-large. A parent or designated adult must receive the child from the teacher.
2. Youth in grades 6-12 may be released from an activity at the close of the event.

VII. Inappropriate Behavior

- A. Certain adult behavior, while inappropriate, does not lead a responsible person to suspect that a child or youth has been or is currently being abused; and therefore, does not require notification of local or state church officials. Nevertheless, such behavior must be addressed in a timely manner in order to protect children and youth.
- B. Any inappropriate language or conduct between staff member or volunteer and a child or youth must be discussed with the appropriate staff member or volunteer who is responsible for administration and/or coordination of the activity in which the individual is participating.
- C. Treat any inappropriate behavior seriously.
- D. Reporting any violations for Inappropriate Behavior
 1. Any complaints concerning inappropriate behavior as stated in this policy should be made in writing to the Lead Pastor.

VIII. CUMC Reporting Procedures

CUMC reports all observed and suspected cases of child abuse to the Child Protection Services. The procedures at CUMC will be as follows:

A. Volunteer Responsibilities

1. The volunteer will inform the appropriate Director of either Children's Ministry Director or Director of Youth, of the alleged abuse or inappropriate behavior.
2. The volunteer will fill out the "Suspected Child Abuse/Inappropriate Behavior" form, which is located in the offices of the Children's Ministry Director or Director of Youth.
Note: As noted in section IV of this policy, the Code of Virginia states; that any person making a report/complaint of child abuse or neglect shall be immune from civil or criminal liability unless that person acted in bad faith or with malicious intent.

B. All Paid Staff and Volunteers Responsibilities

1. Immediately begin documenting all procedures followed in handling this allegation.
2. Do not confront the accused abuser with anger and hostility. Treat him/her with dignity, but immediately remove him/her from further involvement with children or youth.
3. Observe confidentiality for both the alleged victim and the accused.

C. Director of Children or Youth Responsibilities

1. The appropriate Director will report the alleged abuse or inappropriate behavior to the Lead Pastor. If the Lead Pastor is not available then an available Associate Pastor.
2. In the event that a Pastor is the alleged abuser, this report will go directly to the Chairman of the Staff Parish Relations Committee.

D. Lead Pastor Responsibilities (In the absence of the Lead an Associate Pastor will act as the designee)

1. The Lead Pastor or designee will immediately notify the Virginia Department of Social Services of the allegations. (*Hotline 800-522-7096*)
2. Will notify the Administrator of Business who will immediately notify the church's insurance company.
3. After review of alleged allegations will immediately notify the Charlottesville District Superintendent at the *District Office (434-977-4254)*.
4. At the discretion of the Lead Pastor, the alleged victim's parents may be notified.
5. If the alleged abuse happens under the care of CUMC, the Lead Pastor will immediately notify victim's parents of the alleged abuse. Alleged abuse outside of CUMC prevue, the alleged victim's parents may be notified at the discretion of the Lead Pastor.

6. The Lead Pastor should extend whatever care and resources necessary, but under no circumstances should the Lead Pastor or any Church Leader or Member investigate the allegation.
7. Under no circumstance should the Lead Pastor or any Church Leader(s) be drawn into a discussion of the truth or falsity of the allegation. Do not assign blame or attempt to establish or refute the allegation. The church's sole responsibility is to meet the spiritual needs. Pray for the church and all persons affected by the allegations.
8. Pastoral care by the Lead Pastor or his/her designee is appropriate for the alleged victim and victim's family, and the alleged abuser and their family.
9. Observe confidentiality for both the alleged victim, and the person who reported the abuse.
10. One person will be assigned to be the CUMC's sole media spokesperson. This shall be the Lead Pastor or his/her designee.

E. Mandated Reporters

Nothing in these procedures prohibits a mandated reporter from reporting child abuse and neglect directly to Child Protection Services.

IX. Policy Review

The Child and Youth Protection Policy and Procedures of CUMC are to be reviewed annually in March by the Child Protection Committee, with suggested changes brought to the Church Council for consideration. The Child Protection Committee (5-7 members) will be nominated each year by the Lay Leadership Committee. An affirmation of this report will be made each year at Charge Conference to insure the integrity of the policy and procedures.