



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

**I. Mission**

Culpeper United Methodist Church strives to provide a safe environment 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 (hereafter referred to as CYPP) is to:

- A. Protect our children and youth by providing a caring and secure environment for them in all activities sponsored by CUMC or outside group, including but not limited to: Sunday school, youth programs, scouts, choirs, nursery, Wednesday night activities, home school groups, CUMC Children and Youth Mission trips, and 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 Safe Sanctuary 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 the congregation and facilities. This caring community seeks to prevent abuse in any form. CUMC strives to be in ministry with victims of abuse and their families, along with the alleged abusers and their families. This congregation is especially mindful of its responsibility to the children and youth committed to its care. The Bible is central to our understanding and upon it all policies, procedures, and ministries must stand.

*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, leaders, paid staff and volunteers 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:

- A. 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;
- B. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care neglects or refuses to provide care necessary for his health....
- C. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care abandons such child;
- D. 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;
- E. 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;
- F. 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 § [55.1-2000](#), 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 Tier III offender pursuant to § [9.1-902](#);
- G. Who has been identified as a victim of sex trafficking or severe forms of trafficking as defined in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, 22 U.S.C § 7102 et seq., and in the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act of 2015, 42 U.S.C. § 5101 et seq.

Section 63.2-1509 of the Code of Virginia, states in part that... any teacher or other person employed in a public or private school, kindergarten, or child day program... or any person who has received training approved by the Department of Social Services for the purposes of recognizing and reporting child abuse and neglect... who, in their professional or official capacity, have reason to suspect that a child is an abused or neglected child, shall report the matter immediately to the local department of the county or city wherein the child resides or wherein the abuse or neglect is believed to have occurred or to the Department's toll-free child abuse and neglect hotline.

See Section VIII. CUMC Reporting Procedures

Section 63.2-1512 of the Code of Virginia, states that “Any person making a report pursuant to § 63.2-1509, a complaint pursuant to § 63.2-1510, or who takes a child into custody pursuant to § 63.2-1517, or who participates in a judicial proceeding resulting therefrom shall be immune from any civil or criminal liability in connection therewith, unless it is proven that such person acted in bad faith or with malicious intent.”

## V. Child Abuse

### A. Definition

The Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment ACT (CAPTA) (42 U.S.C.A. §5106g), as amended and reauthorized by the CAPTA Reauthorization Act of 2010, defines child abuse and neglect as, at minimum:

*“Any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation; or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm.”*

### 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 for a child’s basic needs, such as food, clothing, shelter or appropriate supervision for a child. 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 delayed development and abnormal behavior. 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**

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 pastor or the designee is required.
- Should approval be granted, 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 (CYPP).
  - b) Complete and sign the "Information Form and Agreement for Workers in Children's and Youth Ministries," and complete a background check form online (paper forms provided on request).
2. All volunteers and staff, within their first 90 days of working with children or youth, must attend a training session on the CYPP.
  - a) CYPP training will be offered at least two times each year or as needed.
  - 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 volunteer current with CYPP training or a Nursery Teacher.
    - This is only on a case-by-case basis and must be approved by either the Children's Director or the Nursery Coordinator.
    - This exception for a non-screened and trained volunteer can only be permitted two times within a three-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 6<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup>.
  - b) If a youth helper is 18 years of age, they must have a background check done.
  - c) An abbreviated CYPP training for youth helpers is required and will be scheduled by the Children's Director.

Sections from the current CYPP 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 Director or Youth Director will submit the volunteer's information to a private organization to be processed through a secure website.

Note: The Executive Director or authorized staff 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 pastor or designee.

6. Record Retention

- a) The Children's Director is responsible for maintaining all Child and Youth Volunteers' Information & Agreement Form, Background checks, and any other documentation pertaining to the volunteer in a secure location.
- b) Documentation will be retained for 3 years from the date of background check or renewal, or completion of CYP training.
- c) Any Child or Youth Volunteer's expired Information and Agreement Forms, Driver's Licenses and Background reports, must be securely destroyed.

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) Some excellent examples of appropriate physical contact within this "community of love and forgiveness" that we have promised to create within our church include side-hugs and

space-hugs, an arm around the shoulder in a difficult time, or hands held in prayer.

2) No contact with anyone's "swimsuit area" should ever take place.

b) Children Ministry Only:

1) Physical contact is valuable to children and varies individually. Recognize the boundaries of each child. Some desire more physical connection but others are not interested at all.

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.

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 Youth Director.

b) Directors of Children and Youth ministry will conduct training as needed and make any existing 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 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.
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 5<sup>th</sup> grade, there must be at least two unrelated adults 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 (see ratios below).
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.
6. Case-by-case exceptions to these rules may be preapproved by a pastor or designee if certain criteria are met, such as in a publicly visible place on a temporary basis.

**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. 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.
2. 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 is to be provided at all times, and must include a minimum of two unrelated adults (see Section VI.D.) utilizing the following ratios:
  - 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) youth
- 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 the 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 requisite number of staff persons or adult leaders are 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 the same route at the same time, and only one adult is required in each vehicle. There should never be only one adult in a vehicle with one child unless there is an emergency.
    - Youth **are not** to drive other youth or children 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 copy of the 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 a bus.)

A copy of current license will be included with their Information and 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

- 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 5<sup>th</sup> 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. While some behavior may not be abuse, it may still be inappropriate and must be addressed in a timely manner in order to protect children and youth.
- B. Any inappropriate language or conduct between a staff member or volunteer and a child or youth must be discussed with the staff member or volunteer responsible for administration and/or coordination of the activity in which the individual is participating.
- C. Treat any inappropriate behavior seriously.
- D. Any complaints concerning inappropriate behavior as stated in this policy should be made in writing to the pastor or designee.

**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 either the Children's Director or Youth Director, 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 Director or Youth Director.

**Note:** As noted in section IV of this policy, the Code of Virginia states Any person making a report in good faith shall be immune from any civil or criminal liability

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. Children's Director or Youth Director Responsibilities

1. The appropriate Director will report the alleged abuse or inappropriate behavior to the pastor or designee.
2. In the event that a Pastor is the alleged abuser, this report will go directly to the Chairperson of the HR Team.

D. Pastor Responsibilities

1. The pastor or designee will immediately notify the Virginia Department of Social Services of the allegations. (*Hotline 800-552-7096*)
2. Will notify the Executive Director 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. If the alleged abuse happens under the care of CUMC, the pastor will immediately notify victim's parents of the alleged abuse. Alleged abuse outside of CUMC purview, the alleged victim's parents may be notified at the discretion of the pastor.
5. The Pastor should extend whatever care and resources necessary, but under no circumstances should the pastor or any Church Leader or Member investigate the allegation.
6. Under no circumstance should the 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. Pray for the church and all persons affected by the allegations.

7. Pastoral care by the pastor or his/her designee is appropriate for the alleged victim and family, and the alleged abuser and family.
8. Observe confidentiality for both the alleged victim and the person who reported the abuse.
9. One person will be assigned to be the CUMC's sole media spokesperson. This shall be the 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 of CUMC are to be reviewed no less often than every other year or more frequently if needed by an ad hoc team with suggested changes brought to the Leadership Team for consideration and approval. An affirmation of this report will be made by the Leadership Team to ensure the integrity of the policy.