

Policy on Reducing the Risk of Child Physical and Sexual Abuse in Church



Safe Sanctuaries Training
Due West United Methodist Church
3956 Due West Road
Marietta, GA 30064
(Revised as of Sept. 1, 2009)

Reducing the Risk of Physical and Sexual Abuse in Church

“ . . . Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of Heaven. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.” Mark 10, 14-15

We believe that God calls us to create communities of faith where persons of all ages may grow and serve in a safe environment. We have prayerfully revised and updated the church’s original prevention policy dated November 11, 1998. Official signatures are on file.

Monty Allen_____

Chairperson,
Staff-Parish Relations Committee

Scott Hellman_____

Chairperson,
Administrative Board

Dr. Tom Davis_____

Senior Pastor

Children in Our Church

“And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whosoever shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. But whosoever shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.” Matthew 18, 2-6

Children are a precious gift from God, and they are full participants in the life of the Church and in the realm of God. Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to our children. The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church state that “children must be protected from economic, physical and sexual exploitation, and abuse.” (As found in paragraph 162C, page 106 in the 2004 Book of Discipline.)

God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from sexual and physical abuse. He also calls us to create an environment where children as well as adults can be nurtured in their faith journey. In response to this, the following document has been created, and subsequently updated and revised, to reduce the risk of child physical and sexual abuse in the church.

The primary source for the Due West United Methodist Church Policy on Reducing the Risk of Child Physical and Sexual Abuse in Church is Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church, by Reverend Joy Melton.

Acknowledging that the Threat is Real

The threat of child physical and sexual abuse in our community, and sadly, in our churches, is real. Recent revelations about the depth of the problem of child sexual abuse by priests in the Catholic Church have alerted many to the potential dangers for children within our churches. Unfortunately, it is not limited to the Catholic Church. A quick survey of research on sexual misconduct reveals an unfortunate number of incidents wherein Protestant pastors, staff, and lay workers have been accused of child sexual abuse.

Various organizations and services, including the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and The Administration for Children and Families' National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information, report that there are more than one million and possibly more than two million incidents of child physical abuse and/or neglect per year in the U.S.; this affects up to 30 out of every 1,000 children.

The most up-to-date studies have estimated that between 1 out of 3 children are sexually abused. 1 out of 4 girls and 1 out of 7 boys has been sexually abused before the age of 18. Even more frightening is that these numbers may be underestimated since many children are reluctant to report abuse.

The National Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse in the U.S. reports that 2000 deaths attributable to child abuse and/or neglect occur each year.

In light of the statistics, it seems that any organization involved with children is a place where abuse could occur.

What Is Abuse?

The depth and breadth of the problem of child abuse is far greater than can be effectively addressed within this resource. For our purposes, we must limit our focus to the prevention of child abuse in the church and its ministries.

Types of Child Abuse

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

1. **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, hitting with fists, and any of a wide variety of non-accidental injuries to a child's body.
2. **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 but can be devastating to the victim.
3. **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.
4. **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.

Types of Child Abuse (cont.)

5. **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 too grim to be true. Children making such reports must not be ignored.

Indicators of Child Abuse

Children suffering from 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 a sign of 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 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. Begs 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, stomachaches, and 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 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 and 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.

Due West UMC Guidelines

Employed Staff

All persons employed by Due West United Methodist Church (DWUMC) to serve in a supervisory capacity for children/youth shall meet the following criteria:

1. Be at least 18 years of age.
2. Complete application form.
3. Be interviewed by the Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC), by a committee appointed by the SPRC, by the Senior Pastor or Associate Pastor, or by a full-time DWUMC Employee with supervisory authority.
4. Complete an authorization and consent form for a background check.
5. Allow DWUMC to reserve the right to do fingerprinting as part of a background check.
6. Attend one Safe Sanctuaries training session each year.
7. Read and understand the DWUMC policy on reducing the risk of child physical and sexual abuse in the church, and sign a form certifying both.

Due West UMC Guidelines (Cont.)

Supervisory Volunteer Staff (adult volunteers who serve on a regular schedule)

** Includes youth counselors, Sunday School teachers, Children's Church leaders, Elementary Shepherds, Children's Choir directors, and other volunteers working in new or ongoing ministries with children and youth under the age of 18.

All volunteers serving in a supervisory capacity for children/youth shall meet the following criteria:

1. Be at least 18 years of age and at least four years older than the age of the oldest person in the group with which the person is working.
2. Must be a participant in a DWUMC group for at least 6 months. For those with less than 6 months participation, be willing to grant DWUMC permission to call his/her previous church for information.
3. Complete an authorization and consent form for a background check.
4. Be selected by a Staff member.
5. Participate in Safe Sanctuary training once each school year (August – July). This can be attending an on-site training session each year - either a live training or viewing a recording.
-or-
Attend on-site training one year and review the policy, take the applicable quizzes, and sign a compliance form the next year.
6. Read and understand the DWUMC policy on reducing the risk of child physical and sexual abuse in the church, and sign a form certifying both.

Due West UMC Guidelines (cont.)

Non-Supervisory Volunteer Staff (adult and/or youth volunteers who serve occasionally-usually less than once a month)

** Includes nursery volunteers, Children's Church volunteers and assistants, Choir assistants, VBS assistants, and similar positions **

All volunteers serving in a non-supervisory capacity for children/youth shall meet the following criteria:

1. Must be in at least the 6th Grade and at least four years older than the age of the oldest person in the group with which the person is working.
2. Must be supervised by a staff person or supervisory volunteer at least four years older than the age of the non-supervisory volunteer.
3. Volunteers are strongly encouraged to attend Safe Sanctuaries training session each year, and to read the DWUMC policy on reducing the risk of child physical and sexual abuse in the church.

Training and Documentation of Training

Training

1. There shall be Safe Sanctuaries training sessions offered at the church at various times during the year so as to meet the needs of the E f, Supervisory Volunteers, and Non-Supervisory Volunteers that work with children and youth at the church.
 - This training will be required of all Employed Staff persons and Supervisory Volunteers that work with children and/or youth.
 - This training is also strongly recommended for Non-Supervisory Volunteers that work with children and/or youth.
 - All training will be done in-house via attendance at a Safe Sanctuaries training session OR a supervised presentation provided by DWUMC.
2. It is recommended that each newly-hired Employed Staff person that will serve in a supervisory capacity for children and/or youth attend a Safe Sanctuaries training session before he or she begins working at the church. If this is not possible, the newly-hired Employed Staff person must attend a Safe Sanctuaries training session within 30 days of his or her starting date at the church. If no Safe Sanctuaries training session can be arranged within 30 days, the newly-hired Employed Staff person shall be suspended from work, continuing to receive full pay and benefits, until the required training can be arranged. It is the responsibility of the Associate Pastor, or other such staff member as shall be appointed by the Senior Pastor, to ensure that this training requirement is satisfied in a timely manner.
3. Each new Supervisory Volunteer, upon his or her appointment to that position, shall attend a Safe Sanctuaries training session within 90 days of the time of the appointment. If the new Supervisory Volunteer is not able to attend a Safe Sanctuaries training session within 90 days of the time of his or her appointment, that person shall be suspended from the position and shall not be allowed to serve in any supervisory capacity with children/youth until that person is able to attend a Safe Sanctuaries training session. It is the responsibility of the Employed Staff person that has supervisory authority over the newly-appointed Supervisory Volunteer, to ensure that this training requirement is satisfied in a timely manner.

Training (Cont.)

4. Each Employed Staff member that serves in a supervisory capacity for children/youth and each Supervisory Volunteer, after his or her initial Safe Sanctuaries training session, is required to attend another Safe Sanctuaries training session the following year and each subsequent year so long as that person shall continue to serve in a supervisory capacity for children/youth. That is, each employed person that serves in a supervisory capacity for children/youth must attend at least one Safe Sanctuaries training session each calendar year so long as that person is serving in a supervisory capacity for children/youth.
5. A copy of this document will be provided to each Employed Staff member and Supervisory Volunteer. A copy of this document is on file in the main office of DWUMC.

Documentation

1. Each Employed Staff member and Supervisory Volunteer must sign a statement certifying that he or she has attended a Safe Sanctuaries training session and has read, understood, and will abide by this policy. The Safe Sanctuaries training session is not deemed to be complete until a signed and dated certifying statement has been received by DWUMC.
2. Each signed, certifying statement shall be kept on file by DWUMC indefinitely, or until legal counsel advises that destruction of the certifying statements is permitted.

Overview of Training Sessions

Training sessions will be held at various times during the year so as to meet the needs of the Employed Staff, Supervisory Volunteers, and Non-Supervisory Volunteers that work with children and youth at the church. Sessions will include at least the following:

1. DWUMC policies and procedures.
2. Behaviors that could indicate problems.
3. Guidelines for prevention.
4. Procedures for reporting of alleged abuse.
5. Confidentiality.
6. Procedures for response.
7. Adequate supervision and appropriate discipline.

Responsibility for Training Sessions

The Associate Pastor, or such person as shall be designated by the Senior Pastor, shall have the responsibility for ensuring that:

- Safe Sanctuaries training sessions contain up-to-date, appropriate materials to educate DWUMC children and youth workers as to the risk of child physical or sexual abuse in our church, and how to reduce such risk.
- The Safe Sanctuaries training sessions are provided often enough and at a variety of times during the year so that all employees and volunteers have sufficient opportunity to attend.

Prevention Guidelines

Staffing Ratios

There must always be at least 2 employed Staff and /or volunteer staff supervising children/youth regardless of the number of children/youth in the group. At least one of these people must have a background check and current safe sanctuary training.

If a volunteer finds himself/herself in a circumstance where ratios are not being met, the volunteer needs to notify the person in charge and make every attempt to resolve the situation. If at the end of a class, one adult must leave before all the children have been picked up, the remaining adult needs to move the class to a high traffic area (for example, the hallway) or into a room with another adult.

In order to provide adequate supervision for the safety and well-being of children participating in the programs and activities of DWUMC, following ratios (Employed Staff + Supervisory Volunteers + Non-Supervisory Volunteers to children/youth) are recommended:

- | | | |
|---------------|------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Infants | 2:6 | infants (under 12 months) |
| 2. Toddlers | 2:10 | toddlers (12 months through age 3) |
| 3. Preschool | 2:16 | preschool (4 years & up) |
| 4. Children | 2:20 | K – 5 th |
| 5. Youth | 2:24 | 6 th – age 18 |
| 6. Mixed ages | 2:10 | newborn - 5 th grade |

Special Events, Field Trips, and Overnights

- | | | |
|---|------|----------------|
| 1. Children K – 5 th grade | 2:12 | children |
| 2. Youth 6 th – 8 th grade | 2:14 | youth |
| 3. Youth 9 th – 12 th grade | 2:16 | youth |
| 4. Weekday Preschool | 2:14 | 4 years old |
| | 2: | 16 5 years old |

Weekday Preschool

- | | |
|------------------|------|
| 1. Infants | 2:4 |
| 2. One year old | 2:6 |
| 3. Two years old | 2:10 |

- | | |
|--------------------|------|
| 4. Three years old | 2:12 |
| 5. Four years old | 2:14 |
| 6. Five years old | 2:16 |

Supervision Guidelines

The following guidelines shall be used when planning supervision for all church gatherings where youth/children will be in attendance. These guidelines apply to all activities and programs of Due West UMC, and to any programs or events that are held on the grounds of DWUMC with the permission of DWUMC, such as Boy Scout meetings, and private or small-group music lessons.

1. At least two employed staff and/or volunteer staff shall oversee any small group within the church buildings. In the event of only 1 adult, a roving monitor that checks on each program room regularly is required.
2. In the State of Georgia, a married person cannot be compelled to testify against their spouse. Therefore, when a married couple volunteers with children or youth, there must always be another employed or volunteer staff member.
3. Visitors must be authorized by a supervising staff person. A visitor is defined as someone who is not the parent of a child in the group.
4. Children, 5th grade and younger, are not released on their own. They must be picked up by a parent or sibling over age 16.
5. Children, 5th grade and younger, are escorted to the restrooms. Restroom doors are left propped open. The volunteer remains in the doorway while the child uses the facility.
6. Diapers are changed only by nursery staff members.
7. Children (5th grade and younger) should be in a designated program area or be with a parent/guardian or in child care.

Special Overnight Activities and Trips

1. Written permission from a parent/guardian shall be obtained for each child/youth who is part of a group participating in any overnight activity. Written permission is also required for any friends of children/youth that wish to participate in the activity.
2. Offsite events for children and youth, or an overnight event held at the church require the appropriate adult to children/youth supervisory ratios indicated in the "Prevention Guidelines" section.
3. Two adults must always be present to protect both children and adults by providing a check on behavior and as witnesses in the event of accusations.
4. Adults are not to share beds with youth.
5. Any night shift watches and checks on overnight trips shall be conducted by at least two adults.

Procedures for Reporting Alleged Abuse

During Church Related Activities

Should an adult in charge suspect abuse, or a child/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, the following procedures shall apply for reporting the alleged abuse:

1. The adult in charge (Employed Staff or Supervisory Volunteer) shall 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.
2. The Senior Pastor and the Associate Pastor shall be notified as soon as possible. If a pastor is the accused party, notify the Chairperson of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) or the District Superintendent.
3. Once an accusation occurs, the Senior Pastor or SPRC Chairperson shall notify the following:
 - Georgia Department of Family and Children's Services
 - District Superintendent
 - Chairperson of the DWUMC Trustees, who shall notify the Church insurance carrier
4. The Senior Pastor or SPRC Chairperson may also notify the following persons:
 - Attorney
 - Pastoral Care Consultant

Non-Church Related Activities

If an adult in a supervisory position suspects, or a child/youth reports abuse occurring away from church-sponsored functions, the following procedures shall apply:

1. The adult in charge (Employed Staff or Supervisory Volunteer) shall document the incident in writing. Documentation shall be signed and dated.
2. The Senior Pastor the Associate Pastor should be notified as soon as possible.

3. The Senior Pastor shall notify the Georgia Department of Family and Children's Services.

Response to Abuse

Principles

If allegations of abuse are made, our response will be guided by the following principles:

1. All allegations will be taken seriously.
2. Respect for privacy and confidentiality will be maintained.
3. Victims include the abused, the family of the abused, the peers of the abused, the family of the accused, and the congregation.
4. The needs of the victims will be given high priority.
5. Full cooperation will be given to civil authorities.
6. The Senior Pastor, or other individual appointed by the Senior Pastor, is mandated by Georgia legislation to report the alleged abuse and shall be the church's spokesperson with the media.

Dealing with Persons Accused of Abuse

Employed Staff

Should a DWUMC employee be accused of physically or sexually abusing a child, whether or not in connection with a church activity, that employee shall immediately be reassigned to a position that does not have any supervisory authority over children or youth, and shall not return to a supervisory position until such time as the Senior Pastor and Chairperson of the SPRC deem appropriate. The decision to return an employee accused of physically or sexually abusing a child to a supervisory position may be made in conjunction with DWUMC's legal counsel and/or insurance carrier.

In addition to reassigning the employee, DWUMC reserves the right to suspend the employee, with or without pay and benefits, depending on the circumstances.

Volunteers

Should a DWUMC volunteer be accused of physically or sexually abusing a child, whether or not in connection with a church activity, that volunteer shall immediately be suspended from working on any DWUMC activities that involve children or youth. The volunteer shall not be allowed to work on any DWUMC activities involving children or youth until such time as the Senior Pastor deems appropriate. The decision to return a volunteer to activities involving children or youth may be made in conjunction with DWUMC's legal counsel and/or insurance carrier.

Educating the Congregation

It is recommended that the following educational opportunities be provided for the congregation of DWUMC:

1. The general congregation should be made aware that DWUMC has a Policy on Reducing the Risk of Child Physical and Sexual Abuse in the Church, a.k.a. Safe Sanctuaries and that we ensure that our Employed Staff and Supervisory Volunteers are fully trained in order to reduce the risk of abuse during any church-related activities.
2. We will be open to sharing our Policy with any member of our Congregation.
3. We will make every reasonable effort to allow concerned members of our Congregation to attend a Safe Sanctuaries training session.
4. We will encourage classes and presentations that focus on sexuality education and safety to groups of parents within our Congregation.
5. We will encourage age-appropriate classes and presentations that focus on sexuality education and safety to our children and youth.

Appendix

Reference and Forms

1. Resources for DWUMC Education and Training
2. Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse
3. DWUMC Training Session and Policy Receipt Certification

Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse

1. Name of worker (Employee / Volunteer) observing or receiving disclosure of child 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 (DWUMC Employee, DWUMC Volunteer, family member, other): _____

8. Incident reported to Senior Pastor/Chair of SPRC (date/time): _____

9. Summary of conversation with Senior Pastor/Chair of SPRC: _____

Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse (Cont.)

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

11. Person spoken to: _____

12. Summary of conversation: _____

13. Date/Time of call to GA Department of Family and Children's Services
(770-528-5015) _____

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

