

CHILD PROTECTION STANDARDS

FOR

Aldersgate United Methodist Church

ADOPTED BY

CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEE

KAREN MARTIN, CHAIR

JANIE BAILEY

LINDA MADDEN

PAT TAYLOR

BARBARA SKEENS

ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL

APPROVED

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REVISED

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I Introductions

“People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them, and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly, I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.’ And he took them in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.” (Mark 10:13-16)

Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to the little ones, the children. The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church state “children must be protected from economic, physical and sexual exploitation and abuse.”

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, exploitation, and ritual abuse occur in churches, both 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 in their 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 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.

Local churches should:

1. develop and implement an ongoing education plan for the congregation and its leaders on the reality of child abuse, risk factors leading to child abuse, and strategies for prevention;
2. adopt screening procedures (use of application forms, interviews, reference checks, background clearance, and so forth) for workers (paid and unpaid) directly or indirectly involved in the care of children and youth;
3. develop and implement safety procedures for church activities such as having two or more nonrelated adults present in classroom or activity; leaving doors open and installing half-doors or windows in doors or halls; providing hall monitors; instituting sign-in and sign-out procedures for children ages ten or younger; and so forth;
4. advise children and young persons of an agency or a person outside as well as within the local church whom they can contact for advice and help if they have suffered abuse;
5. carry liability insurance that includes sexual abuse coverage;
6. assist the development of awareness and self-protection skills for children and youth through special curriculum and activities; and
7. be familiar with annual conference and other church policies regarding clergy sexual misconduct.

(From *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church - 2012*. [pp 240-241])

In response to our commitment to all children and our desire to create safe places where they can grow in body mind and spirit Aldersgate United Methodist Church, Midland-South District adopts the following policies.

II. Definitions

A. Abuse

Child abuse is a broad term encompassing a variety of acts perpetrated against a child/youth by an adult or significantly older or more powerful youth or child that results in intentional harm to the child/youth, or that negligently endangers a child's/youth's health, safety or welfare. The child/youth victim is never capable of consenting to abusive behavior, either legally or morally. In all circumstances, child abuse is morally wrong and the victim shares no responsibility for the abuse. Persons who have greater power or authority than the child/youth victim, and who misuse that power or authority to harm the child/youth physically, sexually, emotionally, or spiritually, perpetrate child abuse.

The Code of Maryland and the West Virginia Code provide legal definitions of acts constituting criminal child abuse.¹ While we find these definitions informative, we believe the Church must hold itself to a higher standard. Our churches must be the safest and holiest of places for all of God's children/youth if we are to succeed in our efforts to live and serve as the Body of Christ in the world.

While it would be impossible to form an exhaustive list of actions constituting child abuse, the following definitions and examples serve as a guideline for the purposes of this policy:

- 1) Physical Abuse – Abuse in which a person deliberately and intentionally causes bodily harm to a child/youth. Examples may include violent battery with a weapon (knife, belt, strap, paddle, etc.), burning, shaking, kicking, choking, fracturing bones, and any of a wide variety of non-accidental injuries to a child's/youth's body.
- 2) Emotional Abuse – Abuse in which a person exposes a child/youth to spoken and/or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty. Emotional abuse sends a message to the child/youth of worthlessness, badness, and being not only unloved but undeserving of love and care. Children/youth exposed to emotional abuse may experience being locked in a closet, being deprived of any sign of parental affection, being constantly told they are bad or stupid, or being allowed or forced to abuse alcohol or drugs. Emotional abuse is often very difficult to prove, and it is devastating to the victim.
- 3) Neglect – Abuse in which a person endangers a child's/youth's health, safety, or welfare through negligence. Neglect may include withholding meals, clothing, medical care, education, and even affection and affirmation of the child's/youth's self-worth. This is perhaps the most common form of abuse.
- 4) Sexual Abuse – Child sexual abuse is a criminal act perpetrated by an adult (or an older and more powerful youth) that exploits and harms children/youth by exposing them to or involving them in sexual behavior for which they are unprepared, to which they cannot consent (either morally or legally), and from which they are unable to protect themselves. The child/youth victim is never capable of consenting to abusive behavior, and cannot be blamed for the abuse regardless of the child's/youth's conduct. Examples of sexual abuse may include fondling, intercourse, incest, and the exploitation of the child/youth for the purpose of or exposure of the child/youth to pornography or prostitution.

¹ W.Va. Code, §§49-1-3 and 61-8D-1 through 61-8D-6; Maryland Code, §§3-601 through 3-607, 11-203 and 11-209.

- 5) Hazing/Initiations/Bullying – Abuse that occurs when the child/youth is subjected to ridicule, harassment, or other emotional or physical harm as part of a rite of passage, initiation, punishment, or for the enjoyment of the participants or other bystanders. This type of abuse may be perpetrated by adults or by older or more powerful children or youth. While this type of abuse may not always constitute a crime, it serves no purpose in the Body of Christ and is not acceptable in our church.

B. Age Groups

Child Persons up to “approximately 12 years of age (generally persons from birth through the sixth grade, taking into account the grouping of youth in the public schools)”

Youth – “all persons from approximately 12 through 18 years of age (generally persons in the seventh grade through the twelfth grade, taking into account the grouping of youth in the public schools)”

Adult – persons 18 years of age and older

C. Staff/Volunteer

Local Church Staff - any person in the employ of the church in a professional, program, support, or other position or a volunteer elected to a position of leadership within the administrative structure of the local church.

Volunteer - a person in any position of responsibility within a ministry program or at an event; any person who takes instruction and direction from a staff person in a ministry or at such an event.

III. Local Church Child Protection Standards Coordinator

In order for our church/charge to comply with the Conference Child Protection Standards, we will elect a local church Child Protection Coordinator (CPC). This person will be identified on the annual Charge Conference Form. The CPC will oversee the development and implementation of the congregation's Child Protection Standards. The CPC will be trained by the Conference Sexual Ethics Team.

The CPC will have three functions.

1. Collecting, processing and maintaining information on those who apply to work with children and youth at our church.
2. Educating staff, volunteers and event leaders in our Child Protection Standards and those of the Annual Conference where applicable.
3. Monitoring church programs and events to assure compliance with our Child Protection Standards.

IV. Selection and Screening of Staff and Volunteers (how deep do we need to go with this?)

1. Application: Each person being considered to work with children/youth shall fill out an application form and covenant (VIII. Application to Work/Volunteer with Children/Youth),
2. Reference checks: Each person being considered to work with children/youth shall provide the names and contact information of three references.
3. Interview: Before approving an applicant, the CPC will review the written application and references (IX. Reference Questionnaire for Applicant to Work/Volunteer with Children or Youth) to determine if the applicant will be interviewed. Indications that an interview should take place include:
 - a. Applicant is new to the ministry or the event.
 - b. Applicant is new (less than 5 years) to the church.
 - c. Evidence indicates that the applicant has been charged with a crime against children or youth.
 - d. The application or references raise issues that require clarification.
4. The results of the interview, especially when sensitive areas have been discussed, should be kept confidential and disclosed only to those persons requiring this information in order to make a decision as to whether the applicant should be accepted for this or any other ministry.
5. Covenant Statement: Before beginning work with either children or youth, each staff or volunteer will sign a statement that they have read, understand and agree to abide by the Child Protection Standards of the local church. Such a signed statement is required of all persons and is prerequisite to beginning work in a ministry or at an event of the local church.
6. In the unfortunate situation where it has been determined that an applicant should not work with children/youth, the church will handle such a decision in a confidential manner which is sensitive to that person.

V. Supervision of Children and Youth in Ministries or Events of the Local Church

The local church will strive to meet each standard that follows in all its ministries and events that include children and youth.

Two Adult Supervision – At least two unrelated adults will be present for all activities involving children or youth. Youth should not be counted toward fulfilling Two-Adult Supervision.

Permission Forms – Permission Forms indicating a parent’s knowledge of the event and release for emergency medical treatment are required for each child/youth. The forms will be retained by the person responsible for the event for the duration of the event. If the event includes travel to another site, the forms will be kept by the leaders traveling with the group and copies will be kept at the church.

Co-ed Events – There will be at least one adult of each gender present at co-ed events. At single gender events, at least one of the two or more adults present will be of the same gender as the children/youth.

Transportation – When transportation is provided to, from, or as a part of an event:

1. Driver must be at least 21 years old.
2. Driver must have a valid US driver’s license for the vehicle being operated.
3. The vehicle must be insured. Driver must have proof of insurance in his/her possession.
4. Driver must be accompanied by at least 2 children/youth and be part of a caravan with other vehicles or be accompanied by another adult.

Open Door Policy – Parents, volunteers, or local church staff may visit and observe any part of any program at any time.

Sensitive Areas – Leaders of a program should avoid being in sensitive areas such as bathrooms, shower areas, and changing rooms with participants. No leader will ever be the only adult in such areas when children/youth are present.

Housing – The following standards will be followed when housing is provided as a part of the event:

1. Whenever possible, males and females will sleep in different areas (e.g., rooms, floors, cabins, etc.)
2. Adults must keep an appropriate distance from children/youth sleeping near them.
3. Whenever possible, separate bathrooms will be designated for each gender. When only one bathroom is available, privacy will be assured by means of a lock, a sign or a sentry.
4. Adults will not share a room with less than 4 children/youth.

Medical Support – Leaders will know the location of the nearest medical facility and have telephone access to emergency medical assistance.

Hazing/Initiations/Bullying – All forms of hazing will be avoided even when the young person targeted agrees to go along.

Participant Covenant Statement – All volunteers and staff, including drivers, shall have read and signed the Participant Covenant Statement (page 13).

VI. Response by Local Church Staff and Volunteers to Allegations of Abuse

As caring Christians, we are committed to protect and advocate for children/youth participating in the life of the church. The church is entrusted to provide an emotionally safe, spiritually grounded, healthy environment for children, youth, and adults in which they are protected from abuse of any kind. It is our legal and moral responsibility to report suspected abuse whenever it comes to our attention regardless of where that suspected abuse takes place. We shall report suspected abuse to stop potentially existing abuse and to prevent further abuse. To report suspected abuse is to be a witness to the world of the love and justice of God. Reporting abuse is a form of ministering to the needs of those crying out for help or too weak to help themselves.

If abuse is suspected by, observed by, or disclosed to a staff person or volunteer, that person shall report the incident immediately to the leader of the event as well as the appropriate state office of Child Protection Services and, in the instance of serious physical or sexual abuse, contact Law Enforcement.

In the event of any suspected abuse or neglect, the reporter will do the following:

- Immediately separate the alleged perpetrator from contact with children and youth. Be careful to realize this is a precaution and not a presumption of guilt.
- Immediately separate the alleged victim from other children and youth in the program. Take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety of the alleged victim until the parents or guardians arrive.
- Immediately notify the proper authorities, i.e., Children Protection Services, Department of Health and Human Services, local law enforcement, etc. This is a requirement of law. Do not attempt an investigation. This should be left to the professionals who are familiar with these cases.
- Report the incident to the pastor and CPC for advice and support in following procedures.
- If the accused is a clergy member of the annual conference, local pastor, or diaconal minister, appropriate provisions of the *Book of Discipline* must be followed. Contact your District Superintendent for assistance regarding disciplinary provisions.
- Notify the parents or legal guardians of the alleged victim. It is important to emphasize that the authorities must be notified even if the parents do not wish the incident to be reported. (Note: if one or both of the parents or the legal guardian is the alleged abuser, contact the proper authorities and follow their advice on how to proceed.)
- Establish and maintain a written report of the basic information to ensure on-going ministry to, and advocacy for, the victims and others involved. Use the "Suspected Abuse Report" form (X. Report of Suspected Incident of Child/Youth Abuse or Misconduct) for this report. The report shall be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It shall be written in ink or typed to prevent changes. It shall at all times be treated with the highest confidentiality. The report shall be retained in the church office where it shall remain confidential.

If abuse occurs or is reported, it is our **long-range desire** to act as an advocate for all affected persons, providing support, information, assistance, and intervention. We seek to provide a supportive atmosphere, offering both objectivity and empathy as we seek to create a climate in which healing can take place.

VII. Education of Workers

In partnership with the West Virginia Conference Sexual Ethics Team and Child Protection trainings which it staffs, the local church/charge CPC will provide appropriate training, focused on current and timely issues, for those who will work with children and youth.

This training should include:

- The definition and recognition of child abuse
- The local church standards, policies, and procedures and their purpose as protection for children/youth and for those working with them
- The policy/procedures on reporting abuse and appropriate forms
- The meaning and importance of confidentiality
- The maintenance of a positive learning environment, including appropriate discipline and age-level characteristics
- Appropriate behavior for teachers and leaders.

Consistency of training scope and presentation is very important. A record of persons who have successfully completed approved training shall be maintained by the local church, noting the date of completion and the training materials used.

VIII. Application to Work/Volunteer with Children and/or Youth

ALDERSGATE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH/MIDLAND SOUTH DISTRICT APPLICATION TO WORK/VOLUNTEER WITH CHILDREN AND/OR YOUTH

This application and reference form are to be completed by all persons (volunteer or compensated) who desire to work with children or youth in our local church. This application form is being used to help the church provide a safe and secure environment for those children and youth who participate in our programs and events and for those who work with them.

Part 1 - Personal

Date _____

Name _____
Last First Middle

Former Name (if applicable) _____

Present Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Home Phone _____ Other Phone Numbers _____

E-Mail Address _____

How long have you lived at the above address? _____

If less than one year, provide all addresses for the past five years:

Please indicate the type of youth or children's work you prefer. _____

Why do you want to serve in this position? _____

Please indicate the date you are available to begin _____

What is the minimum length of commitment you can make? _____

Our local church has an open door policy which means that a parent, volunteer, or conference staff can visit/observe at any time. Are you comfortable with this policy?

Our local church has the policy of using two teachers/leaders for all children/youth activities. Are you comfortable with team teaching? _____

Please note: Answering “Yes” to either of the next two questions does not automatically disqualify you from the position for which you are applying. An affirmative answer will necessitate an interview to provide further explanation.

Have you ever been charged with, convicted of, or plead guilty or no contest to a crime against children or other persons? _____

Have you ever committed any act of child abuse or sexual molestation against a minor?

Part 2 – Church History and Prior Children/Youth Work

Other churches you have attended regularly during the past five years:

List all previous church work involving children/youth (include church name and address, type of work performed, and dates): _____

List any gifts, callings, training, education, or other factors that have prepared you for working with children/youth: _____

Part 3 – References

Please list three persons who have known you for at least five years and who are familiar with your character and/or your work particularly as it relates to supervision of children and youth. None of the references may be a relative.

1. Name _____
Address _____
Daytime Phone _____ Evening Phone _____
Length of time you have known the reference _____
How do you know the reference? _____

2. Name _____
Address _____
Daytime Phone _____ Evening Phone _____
Length of time you have known the reference _____
How do you know the reference? _____

3. Name _____
Address _____
Daytime Phone _____ Evening Phone _____
Length of time you have known the reference _____
How do you know the reference? _____

Part 4 – Applicant’s Authorization and Release

The information contained in this application is correct and complete to the best of my knowledge. I authorize the references or churches listed in this application to give you any information (including opinions) that they may have regarding my character and fitness to work with children or youth. In consideration of the receipt and evaluation of this application, I hereby release any individual, church, judicatory, youth organization, charity, employer, reference, or any other person or organization, including record custodians, both collectively and individually, from any and all liability for damages of whatever kind or nature which may at any time result to me, my heirs, or family on account of compliance or any attempts to comply, with this authorization.

Should my application be accepted, I agree to abide by the Child Protection Standards found herein and will live by the understanding that, as a person of authority, it is my responsibility to avoid inappropriate behavior with children and youth in my care.

I further state that I have carefully read the foregoing Authorization and Release and know the contents thereof and I sign it as my own free act. This is a legally binding agreement which I have read and understand.

Applicant’s Signature _____

Date _____

Part 5 – Participation Covenant Statement

Our local church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, and volunteers who participate in our ministries and events. Our Local Church Child Protection Standards reflect our commitment to being a holy place of safety and protection for all who would enter and a place in which all people can experience the love of God through relationships with others.

Please answer each of the following questions:

- 1. Have you read the Local Church Child Protection Standards? Yes No
- 2. Do you agree to observe and abide by all our Local Church Child Protection Standards? Yes No
- 3. Do you agree to observe the “Two-Adult Rule” at all times? Yes No
- 4. Do you agree to participate in training and education events provided by the church related to your volunteer assignment? Yes No
- 5. Do you agree to promptly report suspected abusive or inappropriate behavior to your supervisors and appropriate authorities? Yes No

Signature _____ Date _____

Return completed application to: Church Office

IX. Reference Questionnaire for Applicant to Work/Volunteer with Children or Youth

Your name was given as a reference for: _____

Who has applied for the position of: _____

As a condition of acceptance as a worker with children or youth, an applicant must have on file a record of three reference contacts. Please complete this questionnaire and return it by _____. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

1. How long have you known the applicant?
2. How do you know the applicant?
3. Have you observed him/her with children or youth?
If so, please describe the situation:
4. What attributes of this applicant best prepare him/her for work with children/youth?
5. Do you know of any conditions making this applicant unsuitable for teaching or working with children or youth? Yes No -- If Yes, please describe
6. To the best of your knowledge, has this person ever been convicted of or plead guilty or no contest to child abuse or any violent crimes or had a child/youth removed from their home? Yes No
7. Would you recommend this individual for approval to work with children?
Yes No
8. Please make any additional comments you would like about this applicant:

Signature _____ Date _____

Print Name _____ Phone _____

Please return this completed questionnaire to:

Written Record of Phone Contact with Reference

Complete one form for each reference contacted

Confidential

1. Name of Applicant: _____

2. Individual, church or organization contacted (if a church or organization, identify both the organization and the person contacted)

3. Date(s) and Time(s) of Contact(s) _____

4. Person making contact(s) _____

5. Method of Contact (telephone, personal conversation, letter [attach])

6. Summary of conversation (summarize the reference's comments concerning the applicant's fitness and suitability for children's or youth work)

Your Signature _____

Position _____

Date

Applicant Interview Guidelines

Goals of the interview

1. Fill in any gaps in the application form
2. Open paths for further discussion on the part of the applicant
3. Observe how the applicant conducts self in the process
4. Keep a written record of the applicant's responses to the interview process

In conducting the interview, the interviewer should be aware when "red flags" are raised concerning the applicant. These "flags" are indicators of issues which must be explored further to be assured that all information is collected concerning a prospective employee/volunteer. Some of these "flags" include:

Many addresses or churches attended over a short period of time.

This could indicate that a person is trying to be anonymous. But it could also indicate that he/she is a college student who moved a lot to keep rent low.

Wants to work with only one age group.

If someone would like to work with only one specific age group, it could indicate that person has targeted that age group for molestation. Or it could mean that is the age group for which they are trained and experience has shown that they do not work as well with other ages. Also be aware of those who seem overly committed to one age group. For example, someone who simultaneously leads a scout group, coaches Little League, serves as a Big Brother, and now wants to teach Sunday School may be neglecting their own age appropriate peer relationships in order to cultivate potential victims.

Does not want/need/like close supervision

The interview may indicate that the person does not like to be closely supervised. This might raise questions about motivation for applying for this work.

The interviewer needs to be able to explore issues as they arise during the interview and depart from the set of questions prepared to do so. It is helpful, therefore, if interviewers prepare ahead of time for the interview by reading the application form and noting areas for exploration.

Sample Interview Questions

1. Why are you interested in working with children/youth at the church?
2. How would you describe yourself?
3. When you heard about this position, what appealed to you the most?
4. What specific skills do you bring to this position?
5. With what age group and gender do you prefer to work? Why? Please give examples of your work with this age group.
6. Are you willing to work with other age groups or genders?
7. What kinds of programs or activities would you be willing to lead, supervise or conduct? If trained, would you be willing to conduct other activities?
8. What do you feel are the chief indicators of a successful program or activity?
9. Give a specific example of how you overcame a difficulty in job, school, or family.

10. Give an example of how you overcame a problem with a youngster other than your own. How were you disciplined as a child? How would/do you discipline?
11. Under what supervision style do you work best?
12. In what types of activities or recreation do you participate?
13. What were your favorite subjects in school?
14. What would you like to tell us that has not been covered?
15. What questions do you have about this ministry?
16. Other questions to raise regarding information given on the information form?

One might conclude the interview with one or two hypothetical situations which are typical at church sponsored events and ask the applicant how they would respond in that situation.

X. Report of Suspected Incident of Child/Youth Abuse or Misconduct

1. Event: Church Name, Name of Event or Ministry, Location, Date, Leader:

1. Name of staff or volunteer observing or receiving disclosure of alleged abuse

2. Alleged victim's name and date of birth

3. Date/Location of initial conversation with or report from the alleged victim

4. Alleged victim's statement (please give your detailed summary)

Initial Actions Taken

Persons Notified (date, time, by whom, person contacted, notes)

Event Leader

Children Protection Services

Law Enforcement

Parents

Pastor or Conference Official

Follow-up Actions and Additional Information

Signature of person making this report _____

Print name of person making this report _____

Date of Report _____

Send completed report to: