

Avondale United Methodist Church
CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

PURPOSE: Avondale United Methodist Church seeks to provide a safe, secure environment to teach and care for the children and students of our faith family in which opportunities for abuse and neglect are minimized by providing proper enlistment and supervision of those persons working with our children and youth. This document contains theological foundations, definitions of child abuse, and policies and procedures related to preventing, responding to, and reporting abuse.

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION: "Then Jesus took a little child and put her among them; and taking her in his arms, he said to them, 'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.'" (paraphrase of Mark 9:36-37) Jesus also said, "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones..., it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea." (Matthew 18:6)

The Church, above all institutions, is called to welcome and nurture the child. Our goal is to maintain a safe, secure, loving place where children may grow and where those who care for them may administer to their needs in responsible ways.

The 1996 General Conference approved a resolution that called upon local churches and annual conferences to institute policies and procedures to reduce the risk of child sexual abuse in our churches and church-related activities. We, in the North Alabama Conference, accept the nature of this call and seek to expand it to include all forms of child abuse or neglect that could be possible in these settings or that could come to our attention regarding children in our care. We uphold the idea that to report abuse is to be a witness to the world of the love and justice of God and fully recognize that reporting abuse is a form of ministering to the needs of those crying out for help. Simply, to report abuse can help to stop existing abuse, and prevent further abuse.

As caring Christians, we are also committed to protect and advocate for children, youth, and vulnerable adults participating in the life of the church. The Church, at all levels of its organization, is entrusted with the responsibility of providing an emotionally and physically safe, spiritually grounded, healthy environment for children, youth, and adults in which they are protected from abuse. Additionally, we care for abused children and their families by offering resources that will contribute to healing. Further, we recognize the grace that God gives in upholding Christian community; and we will look for grace-filled ways of dealing with both the victim and the accused.

DEFINITIONS:

Child - A person under 18 years of age (§ 26-16-2(1), Ala. Code 1975)

Conference - The North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church

Certified Volunteer - A person 18 years of age or older who assists in conducting children's or youth activities under the supervision of a staff person.

Helper - Anyone under the age of 18 working with the children may not be considered a person who is suitable be left responsible for a group of children. Anyone under 18 should be considered a helper and under the supervision of someone who is 21 years or older at all times while assisting with the children.

Paid Staff – Any person employed by Avondale United Methodist Church or Avondale UMC Parent’s Day Out Preschool and Kindergarten who assists in conducting children’s and youth activities.

Child Abuse – Harm or threatened harm to a child’s health or welfare by a person responsible for the child’s health or welfare, which harms occurs or is threatened through non-accidental physical or mental injury or sexual abuse. (§26-16-2(2), Ala. Code 1975)

Sexual Abuse – any touching of the sexual or intimate parts of a child or other conduct or action done of the purpose of gratifying the sexual desire of either party either (1) through physical force that overcomes earnest resistance or a threat, express or implied, that places a child in fear of immediate death or serious physical injury to himself or another person, or (2) by a person 18 years old or older against another who is less than 16 years old, or by a person four or more years older than the victim The National Resource Center on Child Sexual Abuse defines child sexual abuse as “any sexual activity with a child, whether in the home or by a caretaker, in a day-care situation, in any organized ministry, whether at the main facility (church) or away, or in any other setting, including on the street by a person unknown to the child. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent, or another child. Child sexual abuse can be violent or non-violent. It is criminal behavior that involves children in sexual behavior. Child sexual abuse can involve fondling; penetration of the oral, genital, and anal areas; intercourse, and forcible rape. Other forms of abuse can include verbal comments, exposure to pornographic materials, inappropriate Internet activity, obscene phone calls, sexualized text messaging, exhibitionism, or allowing children to witness sexual activity.

Neglect – Harm to a child’s health and welfare by a person responsible for the child’s health or welfare which occurs through negligent treatment, including the failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, or medical care (§ 26-16-2(6), Ala. 1975)

SCREENING PROCEDURES AND POLICIES:

The policy and procedure set forth below will apply to all people who give supervision to or have custody of children or who have opportunity to have contact with children in church facilities or church sponsored activities whether clergy, paid staff, or volunteer.

Screening Procedures for Volunteers and Paid Staff working with children and youth:

All persons who intend to work with children at Avondale United Methodist Church-sponsored events must be properly screened and all screening documents kept on file.

1. Complete a confidential application form.
2. Complete an agreement authorizing a national criminal background check and a national sex offender registry check. This background check must be updated every three years.
3. Complete orientation/training on child protection and abuse. Documentation of this training will be kept on file.
4. New employees must be interviewed by the appropriate staff member and references must be checked.
5. In addition to the above requirements, a volunteer must be a member of Avondale United Methodist Church for at least six(6) months. A volunteer who does not meet this membership requirement may serve only upon approval

of the appropriate age-group minister. References must be provided and checked.

6. In addition to the above requirements a minor (under age 18) who is or seeks to become an employee or volunteer must also submit a separate certification from his or her parent or guardian that the parent or guardian "knows no reason why the minor should not be allowed to work directly or indirectly with other minors." Minors should NEVER be allowed to supervise children without constant adult supervision and they must be at least five (5) years older than the age group with whom they are to work.

| |
|---|
| *SUPERVISORY PROCEDURES AND POLICY |
|---|

1. All persons must be at least five (5) years older than the age group with whom they are to work.
2. Six Month Rule: Any volunteer working with children or youth must be a member of Avondale United Methodist Church, or a regular attendee, for at least six (6) months. A volunteer who does not meet these membership requirements may serve only upon approval of the appropriate age-group minister. References must be provided and checked.
3. Two Adult Rule: Two non-related adults must always be present in groups of children except in emergency situations and where not reasonably feasible. When the two-adult rule is not feasible, an adult supervisor will be required to spot check and make unannounced visits as necessary. Reasonable effort shall be made to assure that one adult is not left alone with one minor, including transportation of a minor. A husband and wife working the same room will be considered as one adult for purposes of this policy.
4. Doors are to remain unlocked and open unless equipped with windows.
5. Volunteers are to wear nametags.
6. Staff and volunteers will avoid being alone with a child without being visible to others in the immediate surroundings. If you find yourself alone with a child, you should take the child and move immediately to an area where other adults are present. If you find yourself alone in one of the church buildings with a child, you should call one of the emergency contacts and ask them to come immediately to the church to stay with you until another adult can be present or the child is picked-up.
7. All Employees and Volunteers will be required to comply with all policies during Avondale United Methodist Church sponsored over-night activities.
8. All Employees and Volunteers will be required to comply with all policies during Avondale United Methodist Church sponsored within town activities. In addition, all participants should have written parental consent and a signed medical release form. Consent forms may be completed for a one-year period and should be renewed annually. All consent forms will be considered valid until renewed.
9. All Employees and Volunteers shall be required to comply with all of Avondale United Methodist Church policies including, but not limited to, those outlined in the Child Protection Policy during Avondale Methodist Church sponsored out-of-town activities. In addition, all participants should have written parental consent and a signed medical release form. Consent forms may be completed for a one-year period and should be renewed annually. All consent forms will be considered valid until renewed.

10. Potty Policy

- a. Nursery - diaper changing procedures -
 - 1) When changing diapers, the person changing the child should wear gloves, and have another adult in visible sight watching the process.
 - 2) Make sure to place a paper liner under the child to protect the changing area and wash hands after every change. Dispose of the diaper, along with wipes, in a concealed container that has a covered top with a latch.
- b. Preschool age children should be provided as much privacy as possible, but when assistance is needed the child should be helped with another adult watching.
- c. Elementary age children should be taken to the bathroom by an adult who stands outside the bathroom within hearing distance. If a child needs to go to the bathroom then more than one child must be escorted or the whole group can travel together.
- d. When you are off site in a public area, the bathrooms should be checked before the children are allowed to go in, and the adult should remain in the bathroom area with the children while providing the children as much privacy as possible.
- e. Youth should travel to the restroom together in pairs or groupings. When off site, an adult should check the public restrooms before the youth enter the facilities. Adults should keep an eye on the restroom while providing the youth as much privacy as possible.

Ratios of Adults to Children:

Provide manageable ratios of adults to children for a fairly close gender equivalency to participants.

- 1 adult to every 5 elementary age children
- 1 adult to every 5-7 sixth through eighth graders
- 1 adult to every 6-8 ninth through twelfth graders

Transportation of children/youth to events:

- 1. Whenever possible, a volunteer should not be alone with a child in a car.
- 2. If they are transporting children/youth they need to have a copy of the medical permission form in order to provide that to the doctor in case of emergency.
- 3. Everyone must wear a seatbelt.
- 4. No one less than 85 pounds may sit in the front seat.
- 5. Those adults transporting children and youth to events must submit to a driving record check as well as all other requirements for volunteering with children/youth.
- 6. If a charter bus is used, the chartering company must have background checks on their drivers.

Hotel and Lodging:

- 1. Most youth or children's areas have a cabin style room with multiple bunk beds. The adults should stay with the youth in this setting.
- 2. In a hotel-type setting or dormitory, "It is recommended that youth be assigned to rooms and adults be assigned to separate rooms. If possible, make the room assignments so that the adult room is in between two youth rooms. It

is also recommended that the adults arrange among themselves to check on the youth rooms on a random schedule during the night. If you have a volunteer to take the night shift they can monitor comings and goings. If possible, choose a hotel where the rooms open to the interior of the building rather than the outside."

(P. 94) Joy Thornburg Melton, Safe Sanctuaries.

Outside Groups Meeting in Your Church Facilities

Outside groups using Avondale United Methodist Church facilities must also abide by this policy. In order to use the facility, a representative of the outside group must review and agree to comply with Avondale United Methodist Church Child Protection Policy. This agreement should be signed by the outside group representative.

It is the suggestion of the North Alabama Conference that any outside groups meeting on church property abide by the congregation's safe sanctuary policy. To lend authority to this requirement, it is recommended that the local church's board of trustees (as the body responsible for the church's physical plant and use of its facilities), require that all outside organizations review, and agree to comply with, the church's safe sanctuary policy.

On the North Alabama website there is a power point training session that anyone can read through and a test that can be taken to make sure they understood the material. The link to this test is:

<http://www.northalabamaumc.org/pages/detail/1368>.

If an individual would like to take that test and turn it in along with their background check that should be sufficient if a training session is not readily available. Background checks should come straight from the company, not the individual volunteer.

The leaders of the outside group should abide by all parts of the local church's Safe Sanctuary policy such as: wearing a name tag, bathroom polices, sign-in and sign-out procedures, requiring that workers be at least five years older than the age group they are working with, requiring that two adults be present, and any other regulations that the church has put in place.

This policy still holds true for organizations that perform their own background checks and train their own leadership, such as scouts. If such organizations have already conducted child protection training, and the group has had a background check done on all persons who will be supervising youth or children, they may bring a copy of those documents to the coordinator for Safe Sanctuaries. These training confirmations and back ground checks should be completed and turned into the church before the individual works with the children or youth. No evidence of training, or background check, which is more than 3 years old will be accepted.

This information regarding outside organizations meeting on Church property is recommended as an addition to your safe sanctuary policy and to your trustees' facility usage policy.

Medical:

1. Travel with a first aid kit, and
2. attempt to arrange for someone who is certified in CPR to be present with the group.
3. Organize a plan of action for an emergency situation. If there is a nurse or doctor present, that is your first line of defense, followed by 911.
4. Once a nurse and 911 have been contacted, then the supervisor in charge will notify the child's/youth's parents.

5. Wait for the ambulance driver to tell you which hospital they are taking the child or you to, and have that information available for the parents.
6. If you are off site, identify the nearest medical facility and be aware of people who are able to assist a child or youth in need of medical attention.

Internet Policy:

Youth and children have great affinities for and knowledge of the newest technology and how to use it! As adults responsible for their well-being, we must be knowledgeable about technology to protect our children.

A few web sites that provide helpful information:

FBI Guidelines to Internet Safety

Safe Eyes Software

Pew Research Center–Social Networking Information

Social Networking Sites:

These are sites where youth and adults use the internet to connect to people they know. They are able to "friend" people on these sites and read status updates regarding the daily lives of those friends. Users are able to post pictures, join or create groups that solicit support, and update their own status so others may know what is happening in their lives. Younger users should be taught about the dangers of posting too much personal information on a profile page, providing too much contact information, and accepting or sending friend requests of someone not known personally.

Popular social networking sites: Twitter Facebook MySpace

Cyberstalking / Cyberbullying:

Teach children and youth to use the internet and social networks as a form of communication—not a place to bully or pick on others. You may feel safe because you are sitting behind your computer sharing confidential information or saying something that could hurt someone else. Words can be extremely hurtful, and we should teach our children and youth to be responsible for what they say online that could harm themselves or others.

Photos:

Do not post photos of the children or youth members without parents' permission. Youth and children should not post pictures from church events on their social networking sites. A good idea is to have one person responsible for taking photos, then making and distributing CDs for youth group event attendees. Youth and children could possibly manipulate pictures they make in a harmful manner, so responsible adult awareness and supervision is crucial.

Communication with Children and Youth:

Get prior permission from parents to communicate with children or youth by E-mail, cell phone, instant message, or text. If you E-mail your youth, make sure to blind carbon copy yourself and send a copy to the youth's parents. Send messages at appropriate times—youth or children in school shouldn't be distracted by reading your text messages.

Computers in the Church:

If computers in your church are made accessible to children and youth, they should have cyber safety blocks to deny access to certain web sites. Adults should always monitor activity on church computers, and key words should be blocked from internet searches. The user of a church-owned computer has no expectation of privacy, and his/her use of the church's computer should be monitored.

Safety Tips for Children and Youth:

1. Online communication with people not personally known should never take place.
2. Never give out personal information or identification.
3. Stick to web sites you are personally knowledgeable about.
4. Tell an adult if someone online makes you uncomfortable or asks to meet you in person.
5. Never share your passwords except with your parents.
6. Never agree to meet personally with someone you only know from online communication.
7. Only accept friends that you know personally on social networking sites.
8. Don't respond to technology contact from strangers.
9. Stay out of online chat rooms.
10. Alter pictures of yourself so that school uniform, church logo, or any other any identifying information is not visible before posting.

Adapted from Joy Thornburg Melton's Book, "Safe Sanctuaries" p. 81-85

REPORTING PROCEDURES:

In keeping with Christian beliefs that children should not be abused or neglected, Avondale UMC will comply with the North Alabama Conference practice of voluntary compliance with the Alabama statute on reporting of known or suspected abuse/neglect of children and vulnerable adults. We, as a faith community, encourage voluntary reporting. Observed or reported child sexual abuse or child molestation must be reported immediately to the Director of Children's Ministries, Director of Youth Ministries or the Senior Pastor. If the Senior Pastor is accused of abuse, the Directors of Children's and Youth Ministries may report the incident directly to the District Superintendent. Allegations of known or suspected abuse/neglect will be reported to the Department of Human Resources and local law enforcement. The District Superintendent, Communication Department of the North Alabama Conference and the Bishop must also be informed. Nothing in this policy is intended to require a pastor to violate the confidentiality of confession or clergy counseling relationships. However, Alabama law allows a pastor to report information gained about child abuse or neglect, even if learned in the course of a "confidential communication" with a congregant, employee or other person. Pastors are encouraged to report neglect or abuse, no matter how they learn about it. Only the District Superintendent or other designated person (e.g., Bishop or Conference Communications Director) should speak to the media about any allegations.

RESPONSE PROCEDURES:

- A Quick, compassionate and unified response to an alleged incident of child abuse is expected.
- B. All allegations will be taken seriously and church staff will take appropriate action in accordance with the laws of the State of Alabama, insurance policy requirements, and based upon advice of legal counsel.
- C. Avondale United Methodist Church personnel and members are not to undertake an investigation of the incident, unless other agencies (e.g., DHR) which are more equipped to do so, have declined to exercise jurisdiction. In all cases of reported or observed abuse in a children's activity, the entire staff (paid and volunteer) shall be at the service of all official investigating agencies.
- D. The official spokesperson for the church in any of these matters will be the District Superintendent or the Bishop. No staff members or church members shall speak to the media in an official capacity.
- E. The church staff will document (in writing, with date and signature) all actions in the handling of any incident.

F. The church staff will not deny, minimize, or blame any individual involved in allegations. Avondale United Methodist Church staff will minister to all involved, as well as cooperate with authorities.

CONCLUSION:

In view of the fact that people's lives can be greatly affected, we will keep a Christian perspective on how the church portrays the incident to the community and let the legal system take its course. We will show respect to both parties, and as a community we make a covenant at Avondale United Methodist Church to keep these matters confidential and provide the respect and privacy that the accused and accuser both so rightly deserve.

AMENDMENT OF POLICY:

The Senior Pastor, in conjunction with the Directors of Children's and Youth Ministries, and church council may amend these policies upon 30 days notice to the Church.

EFFECTIVE DATE

_____, 2010