



Bluff Park United Methodist Church (The “Church”) believes all persons are significant to the growth of God’s kingdom and should have the opportunity to worship, learn, and serve in various capacities to ensure personal growth and the growth of others. We, as the church, seek to provide an environment that is physically, emotionally, and spiritually safe for all persons who enter our doors, especially children, youth, and other vulnerable individuals. In seeking to reduce opportunities for abuse by the provision of proper enlistment and supervision of those people working with them. This document contains theological foundations, definitions of abuse, policies and procedures related to the prevention, response and reporting.

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

“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 children. 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. As caring Christians, we are committed to protect and serve as advocates for children and youth, participating in the life of our church. **This policy is applicable to events during which the Church staff and/or volunteers directly provide for the care of children and youth.**

GENERAL DEFINITIONS

Child - A person under 19 years of age (§ 26-16-2, Ala. Code 1975)

Vulnerable Person – A vulnerable person is any person, regardless of age, whose behavior indicates that he/she is mentally incapable of adequately caring for himself/herself and his/her interest without adverse consequences to himself/herself or others, or who, because of physical or mental impairment, is unable to protect himself/herself from abuse, neglect, exploitation, sexual abuse, or emotional abuse by others.

Volunteer – A person who works with children or youth but is not paid by the church for such service.

Youth Volunteer – A person between the ages of 12-18 who assists in a non-supervisory role with children and receives no income for such service.

Caregiver – A person paid or not paid who is responsible for a vulnerable person.

Paid Staff – Any person who is paid by the church on a full-time or part-time basis.

Regular Attendee – Any person that attends campus church events two or more times a month for at least 6 months.

Physical Abuse – Abuse in which a person deliberately causes physical harm to a child or vulnerable persons.

Emotional Abuse -- Exposing a child or vulnerable adult to spoken or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty.

Neglect – Abuse in which a person endangers a child's or vulnerable person's health, safety, or welfare through negligence.

Ritual Abuse – Abuse in which physical, sexual, or psychological violations of a child or vulnerable person are inflicted regularly, intentionally, and in a stylized way by a person or persons responsible for the child's or vulnerable person's welfare.

Exploitation – Expenditure, lessening, or use of the property, assets, or resources of a vulnerable person without the express voluntary consent of that person or his/her legally authorized representative.

Financial Exploitation -- The use of deception, intimidation, undue influence, force, or threat of force to obtain or exert unauthorized control over a vulnerable person's property with the intent to deprive the vulnerable person of that property.

Sexual Abuse– Any touching of the sexual or intimate parts of a child or adult or any other conduct done for the purpose of gratifying the sexual desire of either party through physical force or the threat, express or implied, that places a child or vulnerable adult in fear of immediate death or physical injury by a person 18 years old or older against another who is less than 16 years old, or by a person who is 4 or more years older than the victim.

SCREENING AND SUPERVISION PROCEDURES AND POLICIES

Screening procedures for paid and volunteer staff working with children and vulnerable Persons
All persons who intend to work with children, youth, and vulnerable persons at Bluff Park United Methodist Church must be properly screened and all screening documents are to be kept on file in a secure location.

SCREENING PROCESS

- All volunteers and staff working directly with children, youth, or vulnerable adults shall be required to complete a background check to include a Social Security trace, State of Alabama criminal check, and national (multi-jurisdictional) criminal check, provided that a sex offender registry check is included individually or as a component of one of these checks.
- Background checks shall be valid for three (3) years from the date on which they are completed.
- Volunteers and staff shall be required to complete training on the local church's Safe Sanctuaries policy prior to serving and should complete refresher training at least every three (3) years thereafter or within six (6) months of a change to the Church's Safe Sanctuaries policy.
- At least once per year, there should be an opportunity for volunteers and staff responsible for the care and supervision of minors and vulnerable adults to complete Safe Sanctuaries training led by a district trainer or another individual authorized by the North Alabama Conference.

PROTECTION POLICY

The vitality of our ministries demands active volunteers who use their God-given gifts in service of others. The following rules are designed to give a structure to volunteers while providing adequate care for our children, youth, and vulnerable persons.

Five-year Rule - All persons working with minors must be at least five years older than the age group they are leading/supervising

Six-month Rule - A volunteer must be a member of Bluff Park United Methodist Church, and/or a regular attendee, for a minimum of six (6) months to work in a supervisory role with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. Only with approval of the appropriate children's or youth minister AND Senior Pastor or Executive Pastor may a volunteer serve as a supervisor who does not meet the six-month rule requirement. Employees not hired to work with children, youth and vulnerable adults must be employed 6 months before working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults unless the appropriate children's or youth minister, senior pastor or Executive Pastor give approval.

Two Adult Rule – Two non-related, non-married, and non-cohabiting Safe Sanctuary trained and background-checked adult workers will be present with children, youth, and vulnerable adults during church-related activities whenever possible. An adult supervisor acting as a “floater” will frequently visit unannounced when the two-adult rule is not feasible. In a room where there is a husband and wife team, they will be considered as one worker for purposes of this policy.

Adult to Child/Student/Vulnerable Persons Ratios – The minimum ratio of Safe Sanctuary trained adults to minors and vulnerable adults is 1 adult per 10 minors or vulnerable

adults. Specific ministry areas may have stricter ratio expectations as directed by the department director, Executive Pastor and/or Senior Pastor.

Minimum Age Rule – Persons who are in a paid or volunteer supervisory position must be at least nineteen (19) years old.

Minors – Volunteers under the age of eighteen (18) and over the age of twelve (12) will be allowed to volunteer in children's ministry in a support function, but not in a supervisory role. They must also be at least five years older than the group they are leading. They will also be included as minors in the adult-to-minor ratio.

Windows/Doors – Windows and/or half doors must provide visibility to all rooms in which minors or vulnerable persons meet or doors must remain open. Doors should never be locked when occupied.

Floater-A Safe Sanctuaries trained and cleared floater may be used to monitor rooms that have only one adult leading. Floaters will not have any other jobs during this time. They must have line-of-sight visibility of all rooms. Floaters must be able to see the entirety of each room being used. Floaters must have immediate access to the rooms being used.

Out-of-town Activities – A written parental consent form and medical release form will be provided for all participants. A consent form may be kept on file for a period of one year and will be considered valid until expiration at the end of said year.

Over-Night Activities - Medical/Liability forms including contact information for parents/guardians will be collected for each participant prior to departure. Males and females will have separate sleeping areas. There will be male and female chaperones if there are male and female children, youth, or vulnerable persons, and the two adult rule, and the 1:10 ratio still applies. Adult volunteers will never share a bed with a minor or vulnerable person unless married, This includes Parent and child relationships. Adult volunteers will never be alone in a room with children, youth, or vulnerable persons without another adult present. Overnight accommodations should be selected in accordance with this policy. Where possible, hotels with doors opening to an interior hallway should be selected over motels with doors opening to the outside.

Counseling and visitation-Counseling children, youth, and vulnerable adults on church property should never be behind closed doors unless parents or caregivers are in the room. When visiting children, youth and vulnerable adults, at their home, parents and caregivers must always be present.

Transportation – Any activities that require transportation of minors and vulnerable adults will adhere to both the policies contained within this document and the Vehicle Usage policy. All drivers will be background checked and Safe Sanctuaries trained. Drivers will undergo a complete background check including a MVR. Drivers must provide their license and proof of insurance. Two non-married or non-cohabiting adults must be in all church vehicles when used by children, youth, or vulnerable persons. Passenger records

are required to be on board at all times. Parents will be given trip leader contact information in case of emergency. While caravanning no adult is to be alone in a car with just one student. Youth driving other youth or youth driving themselves is only permitted if they are going directly to an event and parent permission is given by all parties prior to the event.

Potty Procedures- Diapering is to be done by an adult in an open and visible area. Toddlers should have supervised independence- Let them ask. Elementary children and vulnerable persons should have complete privacy unless there is an emergency. Bathrooms should be checked before the child enters and parents contacted if there is an emergency.

REPORTING PROCEDURES

Incidents of abuse and/or neglect should be reported to law enforcement, local and district church authorities as well as our insurance agent and attorney. The priority should be as follows; law enforcement, legal counsel, insurance agent, district superintendent. The church conference authorities will identify any media contact should it be necessary.

§26-14-3, Code of Alabama (1975), requires that certain persons, including but not limited to, day care workers or employees, members of the clergy, or any other person called upon to render aid or medical assistance to any child, report known or suspected child abuse or neglect.

However, volunteers are strongly encouraged to report abuse, even though they are not required by state mandate.

In addition to the requirements set forth in §26-14-3, Code of Alabama, (1975), §26-14-4, Code of Alabama (1975), permits any person to make a report of known or suspected child abuse or neglect if such person has reasonable cause to suspect that a child is or has been abused or neglected.

If a reportable event occurs while the accused is still on the premises, treat the accused with dignity but immediately remove him/her from further involvement with minors and/or vulnerable persons.

RESPONSES TO ALLEGATIONS

Volunteers and staff of the Church will practice and advocate voluntary compliance with the Alabama statute on reporting of known or suspected abuse/neglect of children and vulnerable adults. Allegations of suspected abuse/neglect will be reported to the Department of Human Resources or local law enforcement.

Nothing in this policy is intended to call upon a pastor to violate the confidentiality of confession or clergy counseling relationships. Nonetheless, clergy are considered mandatory reporters under state law and must report known or suspected abuse unless disclosed within the confidentiality of confession or clergy relationships. However, pastors are permitted by law and are encouraged to report known or suspected cases of child and vulnerable abuse or neglect even if the pastor learns of the abuse or neglect in the course of a confidential communication. If possible, the pastor should alert a person of the pastor's obligation and commitment so that the person, during a

counseling session or other confidential communication setting, may choose not to share the information about the child or vulnerable abuse or neglect with the pastor.

The individual who observes or suspects abuse is responsible for making a report to law enforcement or the county Department of Human Resources. Immediate notification of the report must also be made to the volunteer or staff member's supervisor. Any reports made by staff or volunteers shall also be reported to the Executive Pastor and/or Senior Pastor. It shall be the pastor's responsibility (or chair of the staff/pastor-parish relations committee in the event the pastor is implicated) to notify the district superintendent.

RESPONSE PROCEDURES

A quick, compassionate and unified response to an alleged incident of abuse is expected. All allegations will be taken seriously. Church volunteers and staff are not to undertake an investigation of an alleged incident. In all cases of reported or observed abuse in a children's or vulnerable adult activity, the entire staff of that activity shall be at the service of all official investigating agencies after the procedures for reporting listed above are followed.

The district superintendent and/or his/her designee are the only person/(s) authorized to make statements to representatives of the media. All requests for statements should be directed to the Conference Director of Communication. Training in how to handle media requests shall be a regular part of Conference staff training. A spirit of cooperation in helping the media find the "official spokesperson" is crucial.

If the allegation concerns activities or persons outside any relationship to a Church-related event or activity, it is the responsibility of the leader in charge of the Church activity to follow reporting procedures outlined above.

RESOLUTION OF DISPUTES

Bluff Park United Methodist Church believes that the Bible commands Christians to make every effort to live at peace and resolve disputes with each other in private or in the Christian church (Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 6:1-8). Therefore, we seek to resolve issues in a fair manner while preserving or restoring relationships fractured by a dispute.

If a volunteer or staff person has been accused but then is cleared by the proper state and local authorities, said staff or volunteer may reapply to return to a leadership role in children or youth ministries at Bluff Park United Methodist Church.

AMENDMENT POLICY

Any amendment to this policy must be approved by the Church Council at Bluff Park United Methodist Church. All Changes will go into effect immediately unless otherwise stated by the Church Council.