

Safe Sanctuaries Policy

For Workers with Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults

Epworth United Methodist Church, Palmyra
Adopted by the Church Conference Nov. 16, 2003,
revised Feb. 2005, Oct. 2006

Matthew 18: 5 - 7 *"Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, 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. Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks! Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to the one by whom the stumbling block comes."*

The General Conference of the United Methodist Church, in April, 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of sexual abuse of children and youth in the church. We covenant with all United Methodist congregations in adopting this policy for the prevention of abuse and for the safety of the children and youth in our church.

Our congregation is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, vulnerable adults, and paid and volunteer staff that participate in the ministries and activities sponsored by our church. The following policy reflects our congregation's commitment to preserve this church as a holy place of safety and protection for all who enter, where everyone can experience the love of God through relationships with others.

1. All volunteers involved with the children or youth of our church must have been members of the congregation or attended Epworth UMC for at least six months before beginning a volunteer assignment. No adult who has been convicted of child abuse (sexual, physical, or emotional) or of a violent offense will be allowed to work with children or youth in any church-sponsored activity.
2. All workers with children or youth must be at least 18 years old and at least 5 years older than the youth with whom they work. Junior volunteer counselors must have adult supervision at all times and not be left alone with children.
3. All workers with children or youth must complete a volunteer or paid staff screening form which will be updated annually and kept in a secure file in the church office. Paid staff and clergy will also submit to a New Jersey State Police background check and fingerprinting.
4. All workers with children and youth shall observe the two-adult rule at all times; no adult alone with one youth. The following ratios are to be observed: ages 5 - 6, 2 adults to 10 children; ages 7 - 8, 2:12; ages 9 - 12, 2:15; ages 13 - 16, 2:20; ages 17 and up, 2:30. There shall be a minimum of 3 adults on trips, and at least 2 of

- each gender on overnight trips. Counselors and youth will comply with the gender policy of males housed with males, females with females. Married couples are not exempt.
5. All workers with children or youth must attend regular training and educational events provided by the church to keep informed of church policies and state laws regarding child abuse. All workshops offered will be open to the congregation.
 6. Complaints regarding abusive or inappropriate behavior shall be immediately be reported to the Pastor and to the Children and Youth Minister. Complaints regarding paid staff shall be reported to the chairperson of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee.
 7. In accordance with New Jersey state law, all acts of abuse *must* be reported immediately. The staff person in charge of the activity will call the Office of Child Abuse Control (1-800-792-8610) which accepts calls regarding child abuse or neglect twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week and reports the information to the appropriate office or agency. The lead pastor will be informed immediately before or subsequent to the making of a report. If the alleged abuse happens on church property or at a church-sponsored event, the adult volunteer(s) or staff involved will be immediately removed from their position until the incident has been reported and resolved. A quick, discreet, and compassionate response will be initiated and support will be offered to all involved. All information will be confidential. No person will make statements to the media or public. Any request for information is to be referred to the Pastor.
 8. No one under the age of 21 will drive for a church-sponsored event. All drivers must have a valid driver's license, current insurance, and one seat belt or appropriate child restraint device to be worn by each person transported in their vehicle regardless of age.
 9. First Aid and CPR training will be provided annually for all workers with children or youth. A First Aid kit will be provided for each youth group and must be taken with them on trips.
 10. Parents and guardians will be given advance notice and full information about trips and activities. Consent forms must be completed for events or activities away from the church property and for overnight activities. Students and guardians will sign responsibility covenants. Breaking the covenant is reason to be sent home immediately. Prior arrangements must be made by youth or adults for whom it is impossible to fully participate in or to attend the entire event.
 11. Health information and emergency contact information are to be given to the lead counselor and the person working directly with the child or youth. All medications

are to be given to, kept, and distributed by the lead counselor. This information will be kept confidential.

12. Fire drills will be held for the Sunday School Classes at least twice a year. Vacation Bible School and Kids' Co-Op will hold fire drills in compliance with the recommendations of the Fire Marshall. Emergency exit plans and maps will be posted in all rooms of the church.
13. Outside groups using Epworth's facilities will be required to sign a Safe Sanctuaries contract, must comply with this policy, and provide the church office with a certificate of insurance if available.

This Safe Sanctuaries policy will be reviewed, updated, and presented to the Administrative Council annually by the Education Committee. When approved, it will be distributed to the congregation. Those in leadership positions will be required to sign that they received a copy of the policy and that they agree to comply with its directives. This policy will be posted in public areas of the church. A copy of Epworth's insurance policy will also be posted in the office.

DEFINITIONS:

"**Adult**" means a person 18 years of age or older.

"**Child**" means any person under the age of 18.

"**Child abuse**" as defined under the federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) means Under CAPTA, child abuse and neglect means, at a minimum: Any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker, which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse, or exploitation, or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm. No child shall be deemed to be physically or mentally abused based on injuries that result solely from environmental factors that are beyond the control of the parent or person responsible for the child's welfare, such as inadequate housing, furnishings, income, clothing and medical care."

"**Vulnerable adults**" for the purposes of this policy will be adults whose mental or physical condition makes them susceptible to abuse.