



**Safe Sanctuary-Child and Vulnerable Adult Abuse Policy  
First United Methodist Church  
Brighton Campus—Whitmore Lake Campus**

As our mission statement affirms, the First United Methodist Church is a haven for persons seeking to know Christ's love in their lives and share that love with others. Children, youth, and vulnerable Adults need the security of this nurturing environment. Our church is charged with protecting and fostering an overall atmosphere where they can grow in the love of God and others. This "Safe Sanctuary Policy" is a faithful response to the sacred trust our Lord has given us. In the United Methodist Church, it is the responsibility of the local congregation to develop a plan which meets its specific needs and circumstances. No such plan can guarantee the safety of children, youth, and vulnerable adults but we believe that the following policies, if diligently applied, will significantly reduce the risk of abuse on our campus.

**Purpose**

Our purpose for establishing this Child Abuse Prevention Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our total and unwavering commitment to the physical, emotional and spiritual safety of all our children, youth and vulnerable adults.

**Covenant Statement**

First United Methodist Church hereby pledges to conduct the ministry of Jesus Christ in ways that ensure the physical and emotional safety and spiritual growth of all of our children, youth and vulnerable adults as well as all of those who work with them. We will follow reasonable safety measures when selecting and recruiting workers; we will implement appropriate operational procedures in all areas of programming and care; we will train our workers with children and youth on our procedures and policies; and we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse consistent with Michigan state law.

**II. Staff Recruitment and Selection Guidelines**

**A. Age**

Volunteers and paid staff working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults, must be at least 21 years of age and at least 5 years older than the age of the persons with whom they are working. Anyone who does not meet this age rule will be allowed to volunteer to help support an adult leader under the supervision and discretion of the Director of Children's Ministries and/or the Director of Youth Ministries.

**B. Workers with children**

1. First United Methodist Church will not use anyone as a worker for children, youth, or vulnerable adults in the church unless they have completed a satisfactory background check.
2. All people 18 years or older who will work with children, youth, or vulnerable adults on a repeating basis, a one-time event, an overnight, or any one-on-one environment are required to complete the following forms in order to meet the volunteering criteria:
  1. Nationwide background check
  2. Signed covenant statement
  3. Two letters of reference from individuals not on church staff and not a relative
  4. Have permission of a staff member to work in the staff member's ministry

Adults will be deemed appropriate to work with children, youth or vulnerable adults when their background check shows no violent offenses or sexual offenses. They must also show no alcohol offenses for a minimum of five years. In addition, the staff member in whose ministry they will be working must have confidence that the covenant statement is understood and the two letters of reference affirm that the candidate is suitable to work with the ministry's population.

3. Drivers must be:

1. 21 years or older
2. Possess a valid driver's license
3. Undergo a driving record check. Driving record must show no reckless driving and two or fewer traffic violations in the previous two years.

#### **C. Reference Checks**

Church leaders will check two references for each primary worker. The references will be done by phone, mail, or in person.

The "Safe Sanctuaries" reference form will be filled out by the person conducting the reference check.

#### **D. Background Checks**

Criminal background checks shall be made on all clergy, paid staff, and volunteers who have supervisory program responsibility for youth (e.g. youth group leaders) and all other church employees, to the extent permitted by law, prior to employment, to determine current or historic child abuse or sexual misconduct, criminal records, driving records (if transporting children, youth, or vulnerable adults), violent or pedophilic behavior.

#### **E. Prior Convictions**

Individuals who have been convicted of physical or sexual abuse or neglect may not work in any church-sponsored activity or program for preschoolers, children, youth or vulnerable adults.

#### **F. Interview**

All applicants must be interviewed for suitability for the work they desire to do. Interviews will be conducted by the leader of the program in which the applicant will work, or by other persons designated by the program leader. A team of interviewers may be used. Church policy and guidelines should be discussed during the interview.

#### **G. Child Abuse Survivor Applicants**

Adult survivors of childhood physical or sexual abuse need the love and acceptance of this church family. A person's experience with abuse and their recovery process may be pertinent to their suitability as youth and children's ministry workers. Applicants who are survivors of abuse should discuss this in confidence with the pastor.

#### **H. Confidentiality of Information**

The church will keep confidential all information received in the applicant selection process. Social Security numbers are blacked out on all documents once the online background check is complete. Selection information will be marked as such and stored in a locked location with limited access afforded only to church staff and others with a need to know. The Director of Children's Ministries and the Director of Youth Ministries are responsible for the implementation of these policies as well as the maintenance of confidential records.

#### **I. Required Forms and Signatures**

In addition to staff application and reference forms, all applicants will sign a safe sanctuaries reference check, covenant statement, and LexisNexis express screening forms. These forms can be obtained by contacting the Director of Children's Ministries and/or the Director of Youth Ministries.

### **III. Staff Supervision Guidelines**

All meetings of children and/or youth affiliated with Brighton First United Methodist Church will be governed by the following guidelines:

#### **A. Two adult rule**

Two approved adults must be present at all times. This applies to classroom activities and activities away from the church facility. Whenever possible, teachers will be assigned in teams of two or more per Sunday School hour to every class of children or youth.

Concerted effort will be made to recruit sufficient numbers of volunteer teachers/leaders to permit such team teaching. Other church sponsored or community groups of children or youth who meet at the church should have two or more leaders present whenever possible. When feasible, both male and female leaders would be present. If the group stays overnight at the church, or if a church sponsored group leaves the premises, two or more leaders must be present and must include at least one male and female if the group is mixed gender. See additional specifications for youth overnight outings in section III-H of this document.

**B. Nursery and Sunday School Drop Off and Checkout Procedure**

Children birth through age 3 can attend the nursery during worship service. Nursery parents/guardians must check in with nursery staff and sign in. All children, birth through fourth grade, must remain in the nursery or classroom until picked up by a properly identified adult. Nursery children must be signed out on the sign in form before leaving. Older children can be dismissed to the choir room for performances with the permission of their parents/guardian. This information should be communicated to teachers in advance.

**C. Open Door Policy**

Further protection for the children requires that an open door policy be followed. This policy shall state that the parents of the children served, the clergy, administrative and professional staff of the church has the right to visit and observe the children's/youth activity, classroom, or church-sponsored program at any time, unannounced.

**D. Outside Access:**

There must be access to a phone, cell phone or pager when groups are at or away from the church facility. The church office or authorized church representative will be given this number prior to the groups' departure from church property.

**E. Doors and Windows:**

All classroom and office doors will have a window or visibility from hallway or remain open while occupied. Doors that do not have visibility from the outside will be replaced with doors with window when replacement is needed.

**F. Individual Counseling:**

One-on-one interactions are sometimes necessary and appropriate but care must be taken that they be conducted in an environment that provides visibility by other adults. If at all possible, another adult is to have knowledge of staff members' whereabouts and with whom they are meeting. Children and youth receiving individual counseling should be told they are free to discuss any aspects of the counseling process with a parent or other adult, especially if they are uncomfortable about anything that occurs in counseling. All incidents of suspected abuse and neglect revealed during the session will be reported in accordance with section IV of this policy.

**G. Touch**

Physical affection should be appropriate to the age of the child or youth. (For example, it is generally appropriate for a three-year-old to sit in a nursery worker's lap and give a kiss on the cheek, but it is not appropriate for a teenager and youth leader to behave this way.)

Touching should be initiated by the child or youth. It should be a response to the child's need for comforting, encouragement, or affection. It should not be based upon the adult's emotional need.

Touching and affection should only be given when in the presence of other children's ministry or youth workers. Touching behavior should not give even the appearance of wrongdoing. As ministry workers our behavior must foster trust at all times; it should be above reproach.

A child's preference not to be touched should be respected. Do not force affection upon a reluctant child. Church workers are responsible to protect children under their supervision from inappropriate touching by others.

Church workers must promptly discuss inappropriate touching or other questionable behavior by other workers with their ministry leader, staff member, or a pastor.

#### **H. Ratios for Children/Youth/Vulnerable Adults**

While at any event at the church where childcare is provided (including youth group, Sunday school, and nursery) the following ratios must be observed:

1. Birth-30 months: 1:4
2. 30months- 3yrs old 1:8
3. 3yrs - 4 yrs 1:10
4. 4 yrs – School Age 1:12
5. School Age- 19+ 1:18

#### **I. Classroom Discipline**

All teachers and workers will use the following discipline measures:

1. If a child is behaving inappropriately, the teacher or worker will tell the child specifically what he/she is doing that is not acceptable and state what the expected behavior is, e.g., "We do not throw the blocks. We use blocks for building."
2. If this measure is not effective, the child will be guided to another activity.
3. If inappropriate behavior continues, the child may be placed at a table to work alone away from the other students.
4. If the child's disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, a teacher will notify the Director of Children's Ministries or the Director of Youth Ministries who will talk with the child and work with the child's parents.
5. **No physical punishment or verbal abuse, e.g., ridicule, are to be used at any time.** If isolating the child within the classroom or removal of the child from the room becomes necessary, the situation will be discussed with the child's parents or guardian as soon as possible.

#### **J. Gifts**

No staff, either paid or volunteer, are to give gifts to individual children or young people without the prior knowledge of the parent(s) or Director of Children's Ministries or the Director of Youth Ministries. Because gift giving can be a form of buying loyalty or silence, gift giving should be done on a group basis or for special occasions only. Gifts may not be elaborate but should be modest and appropriate to the occasion.

#### **K. Training**

Prior to working in the youth or children department, workers will meet with the Director of Christian Education and/or the Director of Youth Ministries to go over expectations, procedures and policies. Various trainings for children, youth and vulnerable adult workers are offered throughout the year. Staff are encouraged to attend these trainings and any additional trainings that will help them grow and understand their position. In addition, a summary of current child abuse statutes and reporting requirements for your

legal jurisdiction are to be made available to all clergy, paid staff and volunteers who regularly supervise youth activities.

**L. Drivers**

Drivers must be 21 years or older, have a valid driver's license, and undergo a driving record check. The record must show no reckless driving and two or fewer traffic violations in the previous 2 years. All occupants of the vehicle must wear a seat belt.

**M. Off Site Events and Overnights**

All children and youth participating in out-of-town and over-night outings must have a permission slip and "Medical and Transportation Consent" form signed prior to the event (Medical release and consent forms may be completed for a one-year period and must be renewed annually). There must be access to a phone or cell phone when groups are away from the church property.

In no circumstance is one adult (other than the parent) to take a child or children on an overnight outing alone. Female staff will supervise female youth in their sleeping quarters and male staff will supervise male youth. Married couples will not stay together but observe the female/female and male/male sleeping arrangements. A staff and youth will not occupy the same bed or sleeping bag.

If there are members of both genders in attendance, there must be adults of both genders to supervise. Any necessary medications will be distributed as requested by a parent or guardian. Children, youth, and vulnerable adults will only be released to people other than parents or guardians if the chaperone has personally gotten the expressed consent from the parent/guardian. During overnights and off site events, the following rules and ratios must be observed:

1. For children 3-6 years old; there must be one adult per 5 students
2. For children and youth 7-17 years; there must be one adult per 8 students
3. For vulnerable adults this ratio is flexible based on the level of care required
4. If there will be transportation provided there must be a "Medical and Transportation Consent" form on file for each child, youth, or vulnerable adult.
5. Parents/guardians must be notified of any changes to travel or event plans.

**IV. RESPONSE BY CHURCH WORKERS TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE**

As caring Christians, we are committed to protect and advocate for children, youth, and vulnerable adults 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. It is our legal and moral responsibility to report suspected abuse whenever it comes to our attention regardless of where that abuse takes place. We shall report suspected abuse to stop potentially existing abuse and to prevent further abuse. To report abuse is to witness to the world the love and justice of God. Reporting abuse is a form of ministering to the needs of those crying out for help. If abuse occurs, it is our intention 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.

If abuse is suspected by, observed by or disclosed to a volunteer and/or paid staff member of the church, that person shall report the incident immediately, following the guidelines set by the state of Michigan and Mandated Reporting.

- A. Ensure the protection of and tend to the immediate needs of the child, as the situation requires.

- B. IMMEDIATELY contact the senior pastor or pastor on call.
- C. IMMEDIATELY notify the proper authorities (immediate supervisor, designated church child protection representative or the adult in charge of the event.) This person will:
1. Provide written documentation concerning the incident on the designated form
  2. Notify the County Office of DHS. This is a requirement of the law. (Note: Do not attempt an investigation. This should be left to professionals who are familiar with these cases.)
  3. If the pastor is the accused party, the designee will notify the chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee and the District Superintendent.
  4. Give written documentation to the pastor and/or Chair of the Staff Parish Committee.
- D. The pastor or designee will notify the parents of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety of the child/youth until the parent(s) arrive. It is important to emphasize that the proper authorities must be notified even if the parent(s) does not wish the incident to be reported. (Note: If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, contact the proper authorities listed above. Follow their advice about notification of the parents.)
- E. After having reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the incident is to be reported immediately to the church's attorney, the church's insurance company, and the district superintendent. The district superintendent will report the allegation to the bishop's office. Do not try to handle this without professional assistance. If the accused is a clergy (deacon or elder) member of an annual conference, local pastor, or diaconal minister, provisions of Paragraph 359 and Paragraph 2702 of The 2000 Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church must be followed.
- F. A list of emergency numbers will be available to the staff at all times.
- G. If the accused is working in a volunteer or paid position with children or youth in the church, immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the person, remove the accused from further involvement with children and/or youth.
- H. Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the safety of the child or youth is secured, the pastor or other designated person may tell the accused that a report has been made. If the accused is a volunteer or paid staff of the church, that person shall be relieved temporarily of his or her duties until the investigation is finished. If the accused is a paid staff person of the church, arrangements should be made to either maintain or suspend his or her income until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.
- I. Any contact with the media should be handled by a pre-determined spokesperson. Care will be taken to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved. The spokesperson should generally convey that the matter is under investigation and any comments made prior to the conclusion of the investigation would be premature.
- J. A written report of the basic information shall be kept to ensure on-going ministry to, and advocacy for, victims and others involved. A form for this purpose shall be available in the church office. The report shall be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It shall be filed in a secure place in order to ensure confidentiality. It shall be written in ink or typed to prevent it from being changed.

**Verification of Reading of Policy Statement**

Upon receipt of the this policy statement, the volunteer or paid staff person will read and sign a statement that he/she has read Brighton First United Methodist Church's Child Abuse Protection Policy.

I have read the above policy and agree to abide by the policies and procedures included in this document.

<b>Name (Printed):</b>	
<b>Signature:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	