

Duke Memorial United Methodist Church

Safe Sanctuaries Vulnerable Population Abuse Prevention Policy

PURPOSE

Our congregation's purpose for establishing the Safe Sanctuaries Vulnerable Population Abuse Prevention Policy and accompanying procedures is to live into our absolute and unwavering commitment to the safety and spiritual growth of all our children, youth, and vulnerable populations.

WELCOME STATEMENT

As our Lord Jesus Christ calls us to love and accept every person, Duke Memorial United Methodist Church welcomes into our life together those of every age, race, ethnic background, nationality, gender identity, sexual orientation, family or socioeconomic status, educational background, and physical or mental ability. In our commitment to the reconciliation of all persons as beloved children of God, we celebrate our diversity and recognize the sacred worth and dignity of all. We invite you to join us in our faith journey toward discipleship in Christ with mutual respect, understanding, and love.

APPLICATION

This policy applies to all staff and volunteers who serve with children, youth, and vulnerable populations. This policy applies to all children's and/or youth activities sponsored or facilitated by the church, on or off the church campus. Tenants who lease space from the church may be required to show proof of their own policies or adhere to ours based on their lease with the Board of Trustees.

DEFINITIONS

Abuse: An action that results in non-accidental injury that harms the health, welfare, or safety of a child, youth, or vulnerable person, including neglectful treatment, maltreatment, or any form of sexual activity, molestation, or exploitation.

Adult: A person 18 years of age or older.

Screened Caregiver: A person who has completed the Safe Sanctuaries Screening Procedures.

Children and Youth: Persons younger than 18 years of age.

- The special designation status of "Youth Participant" is ascribed to a youth who becomes 18 years of age during their senior year. Youth Participants are still permitted to participate in youth programs.
- A "Youth Helper" is a person between the ages of 12 and 18 years old who is approved to work in activities sponsored by the church serving children or other populations.
- A "Child" is a person from birth through 11 years old (or the completion of 5th grade).

DMUMC Ministry Team: Part-time or full-time paid staff of the church.

Ministry Partner: An individual who is not a member of the DMUMC Ministry Team who works on the church campus or is associated with the church, such as a church office

volunteer, staff of a tenant on the church campus, Weekday School staff, member of Chestnut Ridge staff with Traveling Day Camp, or someone who works with activities such as Appalachian Service Project, Passport, etc.

SOP: The “Standard Operating Procedure” created by and for each ministry area that implements specific logistics pertaining to adhering to this policy.

Teacher: A paid or unpaid teacher in a church program such as Parents’ Morning Out, Sunday School, etc.

Visitor: A contractor or adult on the church campus for short periods of time who has not completed the Screening Procedures.

Volunteer: Any child, youth, or adult who serves in an unpaid role through Duke Memorial who has not completed the Screening Procedures.

Vulnerable Person: A person 18 years of age or older who may have cognitive, physical, or sociological barriers to personal autonomy.

REVIEW OF POLICY

This policy will be reviewed annually by SPRC in the month of June. Any modification to this policy must be approved by the Church Council.

SCREENING PROCEDURES

Onboarding Procedures

The DMUMC Ministry Screened Caregiver Application is to be administered by the minister overseeing that ministry area or program and filled out by the potential Screened Caregiver. All forms will be kept confidential. Only paid Duke Memorial UMC staff members and Staff Parish Relations Committee will have access to these forms. Duke Divinity School Interns are also to complete these procedures during onboarding.

1. Requirements

- a. A Screened Caregiver must be 21 years of age or older.
- b. A Screened Caregiver must be at least five years older than the person(s) they will be serving.
- c. No Screened Caregiver will be approved who has a documented history of violence or sexual abuse.

2. Application ([link found here](#)) Application procedure is to be completed prior to onboarding any person designated as a Screened Caregiver. Application procedure should be renewed every three years. New and continuing applications will be facilitated and maintained by the minister overseeing that ministry area. Background checks will be conducted by the Coordinator of Administration and Communication.

- a. A criminal background check
- b. A sex offender registry check
- c. A reference check ([link found here](#))

3. Training Training procedure is to be completed prior to onboarding any person designated as a Screened Caregiver. Training procedures will be renewed every year. Proof of completion and renewal will be facilitated and maintained by the minister

overseeing that ministry area or program.

- a. [The full Safe Sanctuaries training](#)
- b. A thorough review of this policy
- c. Completed questionnaire and quiz at the end of the training
- d. Review of the SOP for the ministries in which the applicant will serve

CARE SPECIFICS

Ratios

At least two unrelated Screened Caregivers shall be present at all church activities attended by Children, Youth, or Vulnerable Persons on or off the church campus.

- Two Screened Caregivers must be directly in attendance during church sponsored programs at all times. This applies to activities on the church campus, activities away from the church campus, and when transporting children, youth and vulnerable persons.
- A concerted effort will be made to recruit a sufficient number of volunteer teachers or Screened Caregivers 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. If the group stays overnight on the church campus, or if a church sponsored group leaves the church campus, two or more Screened Caregivers must be present. See additional specifications for youth overnight outings in this document. (Link Youth SOP here)¹
- Goals For Worker to Child Ratios – DMUMC has a goal of maintaining the following ratios of Screened Caregivers to children when feasible. These ratios are goals. The church recognizes that in some circumstances achieving these ratios may not be feasible, such as an unexpected number of children, youth, or vulnerable persons showing up for an event.

PROGRAM	Screened Caregiver	Children Youth
Nursery	2	10
Children's Program	2	14
Youth Program	2	25
PMO (babies)	2	7
PMO (toddlers)	2	9

Pastoral Care for Children and Youth

A pastor or minister providing counseling may meet individually with a child, youth, or vulnerable person provided the following guidelines are met:

- The meeting is in a place where it is visible to others.
- If the meeting occurs in the pastor's or minister's office, another Screened Caregiver

¹ Adapted from <https://nccumc.org/christianformation/files/Large-Membership-Church-Sample-Policy.pdf>

must have a sightline into the office, and there must be a cracked door or internal window into the office.

- The child, youth, or vulnerable person must be informed of the other Screened Caregiver's presence.
- The goal is that the meeting be observable and interruptible.

SIGN IN/SIGN OUT PROCEDURES

Children

- Each child attending Nursery, Sunday School, or any Children's Ministry activity when their parents or guardians are not present, must be signed in and signed out by a parent, guardian, or authorized adult.
- The parent or guardian must inform a Screened Caregiver in writing of additional authorized adults.
- An authorized adult may be asked to show photo ID to drop off or pick up children.
 - PMO sign in and sign out ([Link here](#))
 - Nursery sign in and sign out ([Link here](#))

Youth

- Each youth attending any youth event must have a completed and signed Youth Drop Off and Pick Up form ([Link here](#)). These forms are available from the Youth Minister and on the website ([Link here](#)).

TOUCH AND DISCIPLINE

Appropriate Touch

Appropriate physical contact is important in the emotional development of all children and youth in our care. A Screened Caregiver should physically get down on the child's physical level when possible. Each ministry area has its own SOP around physical contact, which can be viewed here ([links here](#))

Appropriate Physical Touch

- high fives
- fist bumps
- hugs with consent
- touch should be initiated by the child or youth, not the Screened Caregiver.

Discipline

- A Screened Caregiver will report significant disciplinary problems to the appropriate staff member for that ministry area.
- The following are never appropriate forms of discipline:
 - physical abuse – strike, spank, shake, slap;
 - verbal abuse – humiliate, degrade, threaten;
 - sexual abuse – inappropriate touch or verbal exchange;
 - mental abuse – shaming, withholding, cruelty;
 - neglect – withholding food, water, basic care, etc.

BATHROOM AND DIAPERING

A Screened Caregiver assisting with diaper changing or toileting for vulnerable populations shall follow protocols set forth for their ministry area. It should always be the goal that a Screened Caregiver's actions be observable and interruptible. A Screened Caregiver should make every effort to ensure the safety of toileting areas before being used by children, youth, or vulnerable persons. See ministry area SOP for further clarification.

Bathroom

- A Screened Caregiver should never take a child or youth to the bathroom alone. Groups of three or more are preferred for bathroom usage.
- A Screened Caregiver should ask unknown persons to wait to use the bathroom until children have cleared the area whenever possible.
- If a Screened Caregiver is working with a child, youth, or vulnerable person who needs assistance in using the bathroom, assistance should only be provided in the presence of another Screened Caregiver, adult, or medical professional.
- A Screened Caregiver should monitor activity outside, but within sight line and earsight, of locker rooms, bathhouses, and related facilities.

Diapering

- When diapering, a Screened Caregiver should make the other Screened Caregiver(s) in the room aware that they are diapering a child, and then do so visibly in the same room.
- Parents or guardians may be required to complete [Diapering Consent Forms](#) and agree to any Potty/Bathroom policies ([Links here](#)) for individual ministry areas.

TRANSPORTATION

Anyone who will be transporting other persons on behalf of Duke Memorial UMC will complete the Transportation Approval Form.

- This form will include Driver's: Name, signature, license number, date of birth and confirmation of personal insurance coverage if driving their own vehicle for church purposes.
- Duke Memorial's Insurance company will run a Motor Vehicle Record (MVR) background check annually.
- Anyone driving a vehicle registered to Duke Memorial UMC will be required to sign and adhere to the Duke Memorial [Bus Policy](#).

The minister of each program area will make sure that drivers are approved prior to transporting people for their ministry area. The Coordinator of Administration and Communication will keep on file in the church office a list of approved drivers.

OFF-SITE ACTIVITIES AND OVERNIGHTS

Preparation and Travel Logistics

- The responsible DMUMC Ministry Team Member must obtain medical information and liability release forms for all participants and keep those records on hand throughout the off-site activity or overnight event.
- The responsible DMUMC Ministry Team Member shall provide parents or guardians with specific information regarding the schedule, sleeping arrangements, leader-to-participant ratios, and emergency contact information.

- There must be access to a phone (cell phone and/or landline) when groups are at or away from the church campus. The church office or authorized church representative will be given this number prior to the group's departure from the church campus.
- Every overnight trip or event, regardless of ministry area, must have a shareable guide with:
 - Timelines, location addresses, and leader contact information.
 - Partnering organization information, including contact information and locations for other churches, nonprofits, or organizations involved in the facilitation of the event.

DIGITAL COMMUNICATION

Digital communication includes, but is not limited to, calling, texting, posting on the church website, emailing, and private messaging on any social media or internet platform.

- No image, video, or name of a child, youth, or vulnerable person shall be utilized on any digital communication or application without informed consent.
 - All participants should be notified in cases of live-streamed events, such as worship, weddings, funerals, and any other event facilitated by Duke Memorial.
- Ministry and Program staff are the only Screened Caregivers who are permitted to initiate digital communication with a child, youth, or vulnerable person.
 - Calling, texting, and private messaging should only be conducted by ministry team and Screened Caregivers between the hours of 7a.m -10 p.m, except in cases of emergency.
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- Volunteers, visitors, unpaid staff, and tenants should never initiate digital communication with a child, youth, or vulnerable person.
 - Digital communication between Screened Caregivers is permitted given appropriate relational connection facilitated, at least in part, by the ministry or program staff.
- Sending any sexually explicit or suggestive digital content with children, youth, and vulnerable people is considered sexually abusive behavior and will be reported and addressed as such.

RESPONDING TO SUSPECTED ABUSE

Mandatory Reporting Requirements and Procedures

- **North Carolina law requires all adults to report suspected child maltreatment.** You do not need proof that maltreatment has occurred; you only need reasonable cause to suspect maltreatment. You do not need anyone's permission to file a report.²
- A mandated reporter who has cause to suspect that a child is abused, neglected, or dependent **shall report the case to the Department of Social Services in the county where the child resides. The report may be made orally, by telephone, or in writing.**³

² [Prevent Child Abuse of NC](#)

³<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/laws-policies/state/?CWIGFunctionsaction=statestatutes:main.getResults>

- **HOW TO REPORT:** Go to <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/> for information on reporting or call Childhelp (800-422-4453) for assistance.
- Further resources to understand NC law and resources for understanding how to report abuse are available from Prevent Child Abuse of NC at www.preventchildabusenc.org and 1-800-CHILDREN.

Duke Memorial UMC Response

Upon completing a report to the appropriate government authorities, the reporter should then contact the Duke Memorial Safe Sanctuaries Response Team (SSRT) and submit an Incident Report (link found here) to them. The SSRT will then manage next steps. While care should be appropriately given to all involved parties, the priority and focus should always be with the most vulnerable (children, youth, and vulnerable persons).

The Safe Sanctuaries Response Team will be comprised of:

1. Lead Pastor
2. Chair of SPRC
3. District Superintendent
4. At least one qualified at-large member
 - a. Someone who is a therapist, counselor, or other person with background or training in abuse prevention and/or follow up.
 - b. Appointed by the Lead Pastor, Chair of SPRC, and DS as needed.

*If any of the above persons are implicated in the alleged abuse, they shall not serve on the SSRT for the duration of the case.

This team will follow its own SOP (link here) as to how to respond to reports of suspected abuse. This includes any pastoral care and safety follow up, disciplinary action, legal proceedings, media management, internal and external communications on behalf of the congregation.

This policy was last updated in July 2022 and approved by Church Council on July 26, 2022.

[NOTES AND REFERENCES for 2022 policy revision can be found here](#)