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.

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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).
- A "Youth" is a person in 6th-12th grade.

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

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.[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 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.

[1] Adapted from https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/gbod-assets/generic/09-2020-Safe-Sanctuaries-Larger-Membership-Congregations.pdf

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. Each child must have a completed Contact and Medical Release Form.
- The parent or guardian must inform a Screened Caregiver in writing of additional authorized adults.
- An authorized adult may be asked to show a photo ID to drop off or pick up children.
    - PMO sign in and sign out
    - Nursery sign in and sign out

Youth

- Each youth participating in any youth event must have a completed and signed Youth Contact and Medical Release Form.
- Each youth attending any youth event must have a completed and signed Youth Pick Up and Drop Off form. These forms are available from the Youth Minister and on the website.

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.

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, Bathroom Consent Forms, and agree to any Potty/Bathroom policies for individual ministry areas.

Youth Bathroom Policies

- Screened Caregivers in charge of events held on church property will make sure to identify and inform youth on the closest gender-non-specific bathroom within the building.
- Screened Caregivers will do their best to contact agencies or ministry partners in advance to inquire and identify gender-non-specific bathrooms on the premises where youth will be staying. The chaperones will then inform youth on the location of this bathroom to ensure that any trans, nonbinary, or gender-non-conforming youth have safe and comfortable access to a bathroom
    - If there is not a gender-non-specific bathroom on the premises for a youth trip, Screened Caregivers will give clear communication to any trans, non-binary, or gender-non-conforming youth prior to the beginning of this event.

TRANSPORTATION

Any child or youth being transported by Screened Caregivers and approved drivers must have a completed and up to date Transportation Consent Form on file.

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.

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.

Rule of Three:

- The Rule of Three allows for there to be one Screened Caregiver in the car while driving youth **ONLY** if there are two or more students in that car. This represents a change from the Standard Operating Procedure of having 2 Screened Caregivers per vehicle when transporting students for a trip.
- Duke Memorial's Youth Leaders commit to only relying on the Rule of Three when they are unable to obtain enough Screened Caregivers to have 2 Screened Caregivers in each vehicle or having 2 Screened Caregivers in each vehicle would cause a significant increase in the cost of the trip.
- When a trip deviates from the Standard Operating Procedure and leaders plan on implementing the Rule of Three, guardians will be asked to sign a Rule of Three Transportation Consent Form that reflects the change in transportation procedure.

Youth Drivers:

Youth over the age of 16 may be permitted to drive themselves to Duke Memorial Youth events with the following guidelines and stipulations.

- Youth Group (DMYF) or In-town/**non-overnight** trips: Youth over 16 are permitted to drive themselves and their siblings without prior notice given to Screened Caregivers. Guardian permission is still required.
    - We understand that sometimes youth may be permitted by their guardians to ride to in-town events with other youth. If these youth are not related, we expect the guardians of each involved youth to provide the Screened Caregiver in charge of this event with written permission/consent.
- Overnight /Out-of-town Trips: Youth over the age of 16 are permitted to drive themselves to and from overnight or out of town trips. Guardian permission and expressed written permission must be provided to the Screened Caregivers prior to the trip.
    - Youth WILL NOT be permitted to drive other unrelated youth on overnight or out-of-town trips.

OFF-SITE ACTIVITIES

Screened caregivers are allowed to meet with children, youth, or a vulnerable person off-site if the following conditions are met:

- The setting is public where other adults can see the meeting such as a coffee shop or restaurant.
- A parent or guardian is aware of the details of the off-site meeting including all who will be present, timing, and location of the meeting.
- Transportation to and from the meeting aligns with the above transportation policy.

OVERNIGHT

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.
    - The sleeping arrangements for overnight trips are liable to change depending on the facilities of the particular event and the amount of chaperones. The Screened Caregivers will inform guardians and youth about the sleeping arrangements for each particular overnight trip prior to the beginning of that event. This includes events away from church property and overnight events on church property. A signed and completed Sleeping Arrangement Consent Form may be required.
- 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.

LGBTQ+ Youth

- In alignment with the mission and vision of Duke Memorial UMC, our Screened Caregivers are committed to ensuring the safety and affirmation of all of our youth. The Ministry Team recognizes that there might need to be extra considerations made to protect and make our trans, non-binary, and gender-non-conforming youth as comfortable and included as possible. This may include any combination of the following:
    - Having all youth sleep in the same room with at least 2 Screened chaperones supervising
    - Having conversations with trans, nonbinary, and gender-non-conforming youth about their preferences of sleeping arrangements, and allowing them some agency in choosing a place where they feel most comfortable (when possible.)
        - Ex: If the youth group goes to a camp where cabins/sleeping rooms are separated by male or female, allowing a non-binary youth to go to the room that makes them feel the safest.

- Depending on the number of LGBTQ+ youth and chaperones present for this event, having a separate, gender-non-specific, sleeping quarters that still follows supervision guidelines within our policies for these children and adults.

IMAGE USE AND CONSENT

Parents will be given the opportunity to review and sign the Image Release Form annually.

- No image, video, or name of a child, youth, or vulnerable person shall be utilized on social media platforms, the church website, or church-wide communication without informed consent.
- This does not include live streamed worship services at Duke Memorial. The weekly bulletin will include language advising parents / guardians that allowing their child to attend the worship service implies consent to the use of their image in the live stream and the archived YouTube video.

DIGITAL COMMUNICATION CONSENT FORM

Digital communication includes, but is not limited to, calling, texting, emailing, and private messaging on any social media or internet platform. Parents will be given the opportunity to review and sign the Digital Consent Form annually.

- Ministry Team Members and Screened Caregivers are permitted to communicate digitally with a child, youth, or vulnerable person following the below guidelines.
- In the event that a Digital Consent Form has not yet been signed, Ministry Team Members and Screened Caregivers can communicate digitally only if a parent or guardian is copied on the digital communication.
- Ministry Team Members and Screened Caregivers shall never initiate a connection (friending, following, etc.) on social media.
- Additional guidelines for digital communication with a child, youth, or vulnerable person include:
    - Calling, texting, emailing, and private messaging should only be conducted by the Ministry Team and Screened Caregivers between the hours of 7 a.m -10 p.m, except in cases of emergency.
    - These adults will only engage with children or youth in ways that are respectful and professional.
    - Digital communication should primarily be used for logistical coordination and meeting planning.
    - Group messages are preferred over individual communication whenever feasible.
    - These leaders will never communicate with children or youth using mechanisms that delete history of communication (such as Snapchat, vanishing messages).
    - 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]
- **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 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 (SOP for SSRT) 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 initially updated in July 2022 and approved by Church Council July 26, 2022. Revisions were made and approved by SPRC in April 2025 and July 2026. Revisions were approved by Church Council August 25, 2026.

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[2] Prevent Child Abuse of NC

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

NOTES AND REFERENCES for 2022 policy revision can be found here