

Kennedy 1st United Methodist Church
Safe Sanctuaries Policy
Reducing the Risk of Abuse
Effective: November 13, 2012

INTRODUCTION

To make everyone's experience within Kennedy 1st United Methodist Church a safe and positive one, the following guidelines are set forth. These guidelines are to be implemented in a Christian fashion, and not instituted as barriers for our volunteers to overcome in order to serve the church. They are intended to protect our young people, our volunteers, our church leaders, and the integrity, reputation and resources of our church.

Kennedy 1st UMC will do all that it can to provide a safe environment free of any and all forms of physical and emotional abuse. The church will respond appropriately to all alleged, reported, or suspected incidents of abuse, and deal compassionately with the alleged victim and his/her family; the accused and his/her family; and members of the church family.

Abuse refers to any non-accidental injury; any sexual activity or sexual exploitation; any neglectful treatment or maltreatment that harms the health, welfare, or safety, both physical and emotional, of a child, youth, or adult. For the purposes of this policy, "children and youth" are considered to be infant through 12th grade.

POLICY

Distribution:

- The Safe Sanctuaries policy will be made available to the congregation through the church office.
- A copy of the full policy will be given to children/youth workers (Sunday School teachers, Youth Group leaders, etc.) at the Annual Orientation.
- A copy of the full policy will be given to the Team Leaders' Council, the Building and Grounds Team, the Staff Pastor Parish Relations Team, and the Adult Ministry leaders
- A summary of the Safe Sanctuaries policy will be published on the church website and will be available on the bulletin board in the vestibule and given to:
 - new team members
 - Sunday School Superintendent to post in each Sunday School room
 - parents at Sunday School registration
 - visitors
 - outside groups that use the church

Review:

- The Staff Pastor Parish Relations Team in conjunction/consultation with the Safe Sanctuaries Team shall perform an annual review of the Safe Sanctuaries Policy in May of each year.

- Any changes shall be presented to the Team Leaders' Council for approval by August so that an updated Safe Sanctuary policy can be in place for the start of the school year in September.
- The annual review shall include the following:
 - Are we following policy?
 - Does the policy need to change or be clarified?
 - Were there any changes to the law in the past year that affect the policy?
 - Have there been insurance policy changes that affect the policy?
 - Other concerns from the staff and/or congregation.

SELECTION AND SCREENING OF STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

Job Description

- Each child/youth worker position, both paid and volunteer, shall have a "job" description. (Sunday School teachers and helpers, Youth Group leaders, Sunday School Superintendent, Hall Monitor, Nursery Helper, Children's Choir Directors, accompanists, Acolyte Coordinator, Junior Church leader, etc.)
- In addition, there will be a clear understanding of responsibilities, procedures and what is expected of leaders of adult groups and Bible studies, and the members of their group.

Job Application

- All child/youth workers are required to fill out an application and agree to a background check.
- The Staff Pastor Parish Relations Team (SPPRT) will document, in the church's confidential file, all steps taken during the investigation and the decisions made.

Background Checks

- A nationwide background check shall be made by the SPPRT for all paid and volunteer staff working regularly with children and youth.
- The fee for the background check will be paid by Kennedy 1st UMC.
- A background check shall include checking the applicant's criminal record for violations.
- If information received from a background check shows that an applicant was convicted of child abuse, child molestation, incest, or some other crime against a child, that applicant shall not be allowed to work with children or youth.
- If information indicates that charges were filed against an applicant, but that there was no conviction, then we will investigate how the issue was resolved and decide whether this applicant poses too great a risk to the church's children and youth.

Six-month Rule

- A volunteer must be *active within the Kennedy 1st UMC for six months before being considered for a position as a child/youth worker. (This does not apply to paid staff.)

*Active participation will be determined by the Safe Sanctuaries Team.

Annual Orientation

The Pastor and Sunday School Superintendent shall present an “Annual Orientation” in August or September for staff and volunteers who work regularly with the children and youth of the church. This orientation will be open to all members of the congregation.

All workers shall be required to attend an annual orientation session in which they are informed of the

- church’s policies for the prevention of abuse
- procedures to be used in all ministries with children, youth, and adults
- appropriate steps to report an incident of abuse
- details of the state laws regarding abuse

SUPERVISION OF CHILDREN/YOUTH

Supervision

- All volunteers will be supervised by the Pastor and the Sunday School Superintendent.

Five years older rule

- All leaders must be at least five years older than the children/youth they are supervising.

Minimum Age

- The primary leader must be at least 16 years old, incorporating the “Five Year” rule.
- No worker shall be under the age of 16 years old (including helpers/assistants).

Two-Adult rule

- Whenever possible two adults, preferably unrelated, will be present at all times during any church sponsored program, event or ministry involving children. Classrooms will remain visible (i.e. open door or unobstructed view into classroom).

Registration Forms

- Christian Education Registration Forms must be completed by a parent or guardian and returned to the teacher/leader of the child’s/youth’s Sunday School class the first time a child participates.
- Copies of these forms will be given to the leaders of the Junior Choir, the Youth Group, and other children’s and youth groups as needed.

Nursery Procedure (Sunday Morning)

- If nursery care is available, children birth through preschool may participate. Children kindergarten and older are expected to participate in worship and shall be supervised by their parents, grandparents or guardian.

Accident/Injury Reports

- If an accident or injury occurs during any church sponsored class, event, or activity, an Accident Report will be completed by the leader/teacher within 24 hours and given to the Pastor or any member of the Safe Sanctuaries Team. If the accident or injury involves children/youth, the parents will be notified as soon as possible by the leader/teacher.
- The parents/guardians shall be contacted by the Pastor and given a copy of the report.
- The pastor will forward a copy to the appropriate team and file the original copy in the church office for an indefinite period of time.
- The pastor will contact the church insurance company.

Retreats and Overnight Events

- Overnight activities in which both boys and girls are participating must have supervision by both male and female leaders who have met the selection and screening criteria
- There must be at least two adults present for every gathering of up to ten children/youth. An additional adult leader is required for each ten children after that. (Three adults for up to twenty children, four adults for up to thirty children, etc.)

Permission Slips

- Parental or Legal Guardian Permission Slips, including permission for emergency medical, dental, or surgical treatment, and/or hospitalization are required for each person attending an off-site event, retreat, or overnight event. Permission slips will remain on the person transporting and/or accompanying the children/youth on any off-site event, retreat, or overnight event.
- Copies of these slips shall be available in the church office during the event.
- Emergency contact information for adult leaders are to be on file in the church office during the event.

Transportation

- At no time will a child be alone in the vehicle with a leader without prior written permission from their parent or guardian
- All transportation of children/youth must be provided by an adult 23 years of age or older (this takes into account the "Five Years Older" rule)
- Drivers must have a valid driver's license, held for a minimum of two years, with no criminal charges pending.
- All vehicles used must have a current state registration, inspection and insurance.

Outside Groups

- All outside groups who regularly use the church shall have their own written abuse prevention policy in place, with a copy of that policy, if available, on file in the church office. If a policy is not available, then the group leader will sign a waiver that the church will not be responsible for unsafe situations.

RESPONSE TO ALLEGATIONS

- If an incident of abuse is suspected by, observed by, or disclosed to a volunteer, paid staff person, or any member of the church, that person shall immediately contact the Pastor or a member of the Safe Sanctuaries Team.
- Throughout the process, privacy and confidentiality of both the victim and the accused will be safeguarded.

The Safe Sanctuaries Team will:

- Contact the Staff Pastor Parish Relations Team and the District Superintendent if the accused is a pastor.
- If the accused is not the Pastor, contact the Pastor and Social Services or the New York State Hotline.
- Record an incident report
- Report the incident to the Chautauqua County Sheriff for investigation. The Safe Sanctuaries Team will not investigate on their own.
- Contact the parents/guardians of the victim without the victim present to apprise them of the situation.
- Apprise the person reporting the incident, letting them know when the authorities have been contacted and other steps that are being taken, so that they are assured that action is being taken.
- Contact the church's insurance carrier
- Respond to any inquiries with a statement of the church policy and note that further comment is not appropriate.
- Coordinate responses to the public with the District and Conference offices.
- Will share the same information with the congregation in a timely fashion to avoid rumors.
- Any further comments will be discussed and agreed upon with the Team Leaders' Council

Other

- If it is discovered, following a full legal investigation, that the alleged perpetrator was innocent, the Pastor will acknowledge this through personal contact with that person. The Team Leaders' Council will also acknowledge innocence through a formal letter sent to that person on behalf of the congregation.
- If the suspected incident happens somewhere other than at a church function, the concerned person should contact Social Services or the New York State Hotline directly.

Contact Numbers

- Chautauqua County Sheriff – (716) 753-4231
- Chautauqua County Department of Social Services – (716) 661-7000
- New York State Hotline – (800) 342-3720