

Safe Sanctuaries Abuse Prevention Policy

Twin Falls First United Methodist Church

INTRODUCTION

Our hope and belief today is that our church is a place where all people will find the unconditional love and care they need to grow and thrive. In spite of this, we know that abuse occurs in churches, large and small, urban and rural. It is a problem which cuts across all economic, cultural, and racial lines. In April 1996, the General Conference of The United Methodist Church adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of abuse of children, youth and vulnerable adults in the church. It was renewed by the 2004 and 2008 General Conferences. As Christians, we must take our responsibilities to our children, youth and vulnerable adults very seriously. While we may not be able to completely prevent abuse in every situation, it is possible for us to greatly reduce the risk by following a policy of prevention. We are responsible to create an environment of safe sanctuary for children, youth and vulnerable adults, and those who work with them. Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we adopt this policy for reducing the risk of abuse of children, youth and vulnerable adults in our church.

PURPOSE & SCOPE

Our congregation's purpose for establishing this Safe Sanctuaries policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our strong and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all of our children, youth and vulnerable adults.

These standards are expected of all ministry settings (both on and off our property) of Twin Falls First United Methodist Church. These policies will 1) protect from abuse the children, youth, and vulnerable adults that participate in church activities, and 2) protect staff, both paid and volunteer, from unfounded and/or malicious allegations of abuse through a comprehensive plan that includes: screening, training, supervision, reporting procedures, and a response plan.

DEFINITIONS

Abuse: intentional, negligent, or reckless behavior by a volunteer or staff person that is harmful, injurious, or offensive.

Child Abuse – an act committed by a parent, caregiver, or person in a position of trust, which is not accidental and which harms or threatens a child's physical or mental health or a child's welfare.

Physical Abuse – when an adult injures a child by accident, including assault, shaking, slapping, burning, scalding, kicking and strangling.

Sexual Abuse - sexual contact between an adult or other significantly older, more powerful person and a child, youth, or vulnerable adult. It includes behavior such as

inappropriate verbal stimulation, taking or showing sexually explicit photos of or to a child, or exposing a child to pornography or adult sexual activity.

Emotional Abuse – verbal assault or emotional cruelty that affects a child’s self esteem.

Adult: a person 18 years old or older.

Activities: any activity or programs in which children, youth, or vulnerable adults are under supervision of staff persons or volunteers.

Background Checks: Researching references and records for indications of past or potential abusive and/or criminal activity.

Child: person from birth until they turn 12 years old.

Conference: The Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Person-in-Charge (PIC): Staff person or volunteer who is the person responsible for the event or activity.

Staff person: any person employed by the local ministry setting that is responsible for activities involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

Volunteer: a person who assists in conducting activities under the supervision of person(s) in charge.

Vulnerable Adults: any person 18 years of age or older with diminished physical, mental, or emotional capacities.

We: The Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference.

Youth: any person 12 years old to his/her 18th birthday.

SCREENING PROCEDURES

1. All adults, volunteer or staff persons, who have regular and direct contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults shall be required to complete an application including voluntary disclosure of information including legal name and other names previously used, date of birth, and voluntary disclosure of any convictions of abusive behavior.

2. Minimum background screenings shall include:

- a) Reference checks from application form.
- b) Review of the Oregon and Idaho lists of sexual offenders or State or National criminal background checks.

3. At minimum, ministry setting abuse prevention policies shall incorporate the following:

- a) All staff persons and volunteers, who have regular and direct contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults will submit to the screening procedures.
- b) Reviewing bodies shall be established (*the committee will be made up of the Chairs of Leadership, Education, SPRC and the pastor*).
- c) The reviewing body is responsible for review and approval of each application before a person’s service begins.
- d) The screening procedure for each individual shall be repeated every five years.
- e) All records are confidential and will be maintained for a period of at least five years.
- f) The ministry setting will not knowingly hire anyone with a history of committing sexual abuse on any child, youth, or vulnerable adult.

SUPERVISION

1. Required training for all persons having direct contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. Training shall include an annual orientation that includes information about the Twin Falls United Methodist Church Abuse Prevention Policy, procedures and Idaho Child Abuse reporting requirements.
2. Our standard practice is that all children, youth, and vulnerable adults will be supervised by adults and that the “two adult rule” shall be followed. The “two adult rule” requires no fewer than two adults present during any ministry involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults. The minimum standard is an adult present with an open space (open door, window, etc) such that activities can be observed and an adult who is assigned to periodically observe the activities. No adult should be alone with any one child, youth or vulnerable adult out of the sight of others.
3. No person shall supervise any age group of children or youth unless he/she is AT LEAST 5 years older than the children or youth.
4. Parents will be given advance notice and information regarding any event in which children or youth will be participating. Parents must give written permission for their child’s participation in off church property/city park events.

REPORTING AND RESPONSE

1. The adult who observes or hears of an alleged abuse shall:
 - a) Assure the safety of the victim.
 - i) Whatever the victim says is to be taken very seriously.
 - ii) Make sure that the victim is in a safe place and watched over.
 - iii) Do not confront the accused abuser with anger or hostility but immediately remove him/ her from further involvement with children and youth until the matter can be investigated.
 - b) If there is a situation of immediate risk, call the police at 911. Otherwise report the incident immediately to the *pastor and/or other persons* designated by the ministry setting.
2. The pastor or designee shall:
 - a) Ascertain the details needed to make an accurate report.
 - b) Within 24 hours,
 - i) Write an incident report. The report should include the following information, if obtainable:1) The name, address, age and sex of the alleged victim;
 - (2) The name and address of the alleged victim’s parents or other person responsible for his/her care;
 - (3) The nature and extent of the alleged abuse or neglect;

- (4) Any evidence of previously known or suspected abuse or neglect of the alleged victim or their siblings;
 - (5) The name, address and relationship, if known, of the person who is alleged to have perpetrated the abuse or neglect; and
 - (6) Any other information known to the person making the report that would be helpful to the investigation of the alleged abuse.
- c) Contact the appropriate State or law enforcement agency as soon as possible to file the abuse report and provide the aforementioned information and follow the instructions of the agency. (Idaho reporting requirements attached)
 - d) Report the suspected child abuse to the child's family and any agencies required by law. (Idaho reporting requirements attached)
3. The alleged perpetrators of the abuse are to be excluded from future events involving children, youth and vulnerable adults until the incident report is resolved. In any removal of a person from any activities, care must be taken to handle this in a discreet manner, recognizing that an investigation is being conducted.

TRAINING

Twin Falls First United Methodist Church shall implement or participate in training and orientation procedures for persons in leadership who work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. Training shall include but is not limited to the local ministry setting's abuse prevention policy and its related procedures.

CONCLUSION

In all of our ministries we are committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child, youth and vulnerable adult is "surrounded by steadfast love...established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal" (Baptismal Covenant II, United Methodist Hymnal, pg 44). The standards for abuse prevention policies of Twin Falls First United Methodist Church are effective as of April 21, 2009. They will be reviewed on an annual basis in a manner determined by the Church Council. Modifications will be made subject to the approval of the Church Council and must meet the minimum requirements of the Oregon Idaho Conference. All modifications will be promptly conveyed in writing to all persons affected by the modification.