

East Cobb United Methodist Church

Abuse Prevention Policy

Creating a Safe Sanctuary at East Cobb United Methodist Church

Introduction

The General Conference of The United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child abuse in the church. The adopted resolution includes the following statement:

Jesus said, “Whoever welcomes (a) child ... welcomes me” (Matthew 18:5). Children are our present and our future, our hope, our teachers, our inspiration. They are full participants in the life of the church and in the realm of God.

Jesus also said, “If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones ... it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6). Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to the little ones, the children. The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church state that “children must be protected from economic, physical, emotional and sexual exploitation and abuse.” (§ 162C).

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, exploitation, and ritual abuse [“ritual abuse” refers to abusive acts committed as part of ceremonies or rites; ritual abusers are often related to cults, or pretend to be] occur in churches, large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural, and racial lines. It is real, and it appears to be increasing. Most annual conferences can cite specific incidents of child sexual abuse and exploitation within churches. Virtually every congregation has among its members adult survivors of early sexual trauma.

Such incidents are devastating to all who are involved: the child, the family, the local church and its leaders. Increasingly, churches are torn apart by the legal, emotional, and monetary consequences of litigation following allegations of abuse.

God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from sexual and ritual abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults grow safe and strong. (From *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church – 2008*. Copyright © 2008 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission.)

Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we adopt this policy for the prevention of abuse in our church.

Purpose

Our congregation’s purpose in establishing this Abuse Prevention Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all of our children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

Statement of Covenant

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all our children, youth, and vulnerable adults, as well as all the workers with them. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; we will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events; we will educate all of our workers with children, youth, and vulnerable adults regarding the use of all appropriate policies and methods (including first aid and methods of discipline); we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law; and we will be prepared to respond to media inquiries if an incident occurs.

Conclusion

In all our ministries with children, youth, and vulnerable adults, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child of God will be “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*, p. 44).

Definition of Frequently Used Terminology
(As it relates to this document only)

1. **Employed Staff Member:** A staff member who receives pay for either full-time or part-time work at the church.
2. **Ministry Area Director:** An employed staff member who is over an area that serves children, youth and/or vulnerable adults and/or supervises employees or volunteers who serve children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults.
3. **Volunteer:** An individual who serves in ministry with children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults that has been actively involved in this congregation for at least 6 months.
4. **The Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS):** Falls under the Georgia Department of Human Resources and is responsible for welfare and employment support, protecting children, foster care, and other services to strengthen families.
5. **Child:** Birth through 5th Grade.
6. **Youth:** 6th-12th Grade.
7. **Adult:** Over the age of 18 and has graduated from high school or the equivalent.
8. **Vulnerable Adult:** A person age 18 or older who is mentally, physically, or psychologically challenged and is unable to make responsible legal decisions about his or her welfare.
9. **Church Sponsored Ministries:** Includes but not limited to Children's Ministry, Youth Ministry, Weekday Preschool Ministry, Stephen's Ministry, Visitation Ministry, and Scouting Ministry.

Requirements of Volunteers and Employed Staff

1. Individuals must meet the criteria set forth under “Definition of Frequently Used Terminology” in this policy.
2. Individuals must consent to a full, national background check, which should include multi-state criminal record. Background checks will be completed every three years.
3. Individuals operating a church owned vehicle where children, youth and/or vulnerable adults will be transported, will also consent to a full driving check.

Training of Staff and Volunteers

1. Online training will be offered on an annual basis. Ministry Area Directors will oversee scheduling training for their volunteers and employed staff members that fall under their supervision.
2. All employed staff will complete a Safe Sanctuary training course within 90 days of their first day of service. All volunteers will complete an online Safe Sanctuary Training course before they begin serving in a ministry with children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults.
3. Ministry Area Directors will be responsible for following up with his or her volunteers and employed staff members to make sure training is complete. Records will be kept through People Facts (formally called Trak 1) and all Ministry Area Directors will have access to these records.
4. Employed staff will be certified in basic first aid, CPR, and AED training which will be offered regularly through the church. Volunteers serving in ministries with children, youth, and vulnerable adults are strongly encouraged to receive training as well.

East Cobb United Methodist Church Abuse Prevention Procedures

The following guidelines shall be used when planning supervision for all church sponsored ministry gatherings where children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults will be in attendance:

1. At least two adults shall oversee any small group or class within the church building. In the event that only one adult is available, a floater may be used and the classroom door must remain open. A floater will roam in and out of classrooms and check in on all children and youth in church sponsored ministries. This is referred to as the "Two Adult Rule."
2. All church sponsored ministries must be held in open view or within rooms with windows.
3. Volunteers must be five years older than the group for whom they are providing supervision.
4. Volunteers under the age of 18 must be paired with an adult.
5. In the State of Georgia, a married person cannot be compelled to testify against his or her spouse. Therefore, when a married couple volunteers together with children and/or youth, there must always be a third adult or floater present.
6. Visitors must be authorized by a Ministry Area Director. A visitor is defined as someone who is not the legal guardian of a child or youth in the church sponsored ministry and not an employed church staff member or a volunteer.
7. Children will not be released on their own from a church sponsored ministry. Children must be signed out by an authorized adult.
8. When on church property children and youth should be in a designated church sponsored ministry, be with a legal guardian, or in childcare.
9. Written parental permission is required for children and youth riding to and/or from a church sponsored event in a church provided vehicle or in an approved rental vehicle (i.e. charter bus).
10. Children and youth at off-site events will be monitored by at least 2 volunteers from arrival until departure from the church property.
11. Groups of children and youth of fewer than four persons should not meet in areas outside the church building.
12. Anytime an adult has a private conversation with a child, youth or vulnerable adult, the conversation should take place in the open or a second, non-related adult should be present.
13. Every effort will be made to have access to a telephone for emergency purposes at all times.
14. As a means of good record keeping and communication between legal guardians, employed staff members and volunteers, the enclosed Accident Report Form or Incident Report Form will be filed with the Ministry Area Director of the corresponding ministry area.

Special Overnight Activities and Trips

1. Written parental permission shall be obtained for church sponsored ministry groups who leave the church property or that stay overnight on the church property.
2. There shall always be two adult chaperones, or more depending on ratios, responsible for monitoring behaviors and reporting any inappropriate behavior. Adult chaperones should be the same gender as the children or youth they are responsible for. At no time is any adult to be alone with a child or youth. Ratios for offsite trips should be 1:6.
3. In any overnight situation, adults must not sleep in the same bed with a child or youth. Exceptions are only for a father and son or a mother and daughter.
4. For vulnerable adults participating in off-site trips, medical and emergency information should be on file and available to trip leader.

Reporting Procedures

The following should be reported immediately upon occurrence to the appropriate Ministry Area Director:

1. Accidents: An unintentional act which occurs and an individual is hurt. Use Accident Report Form to report this type of incident.
2. Incidents: When an action is observed that does not require reporting to DFCS but does require attention by the Ministry Area Director. Use Suspected Abuse Form to report this type of incident.
3. Suspected Abuse: When a volunteer or employed staff member sees, has been told of, or suspects a child, youth or vulnerable adult has been abused in some way. Use Suspected Abuse Form to report this type of incident.

Reporting Plan

In Georgia, as of July 2012, all volunteers and employed staff members in ministry with children and youth are mandatory reporters of child abuse, as are all clergy. Those “having reasonable cause to believe that a child has been abused shall report.”

1. A person who has witnessed, been told of, or suspects child abuse should report it to the Ministry Area Director immediately.
2. Details should be recorded of the accident, incident, or suspected abuse on selected forms and discussed with only appropriate employed staff members.
3. Incidents are handled by Ministry Area Directors who offer alternatives to the person in question, and records follow-up.
4. For suspected abuse, DFCS needs to investigate. (DFCS: 1-855-GACHILD) The reporter places the call with knowledge and support of the Ministry Area Director and Pastor in Charge (or SPR Chair). Insurance Company and the DS are notified. Attorney is contacted.
5. Keep information confidential. Talk only with appropriate authorities. Only one designated person is to speak to the media.

East Cobb United Methodist Church Abuse Prevention Policy

Revised: September 17, 2018

A copy of this policy is on file in the Atlanta Marietta District Office of the North Georgia Conference, The United Methodist Church. 1050 Shiloh Road NW #201, Kennesaw, GA 30144

Board of Trustees, Chairperson (date)

Church Council, Chairperson (date)

Implementation Procedures East Cobb United Methodist Church Abuse Prevention Policy

Implementation

A comprehensive strategy for the prevention of abuse in a local church cannot be done without appropriate education being provided for the employed staff members and volunteers with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. To remain in compliance with our own policy we will complete the following each year:

- Annual training for ALL employed staff members and volunteers in church sponsored ministries with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.
- Training will be provided for all volunteers before they begin serving in a church sponsored ministry.
- Employed staff members must complete abuse training within the first 90 days of their employment.
- Records will be kept through People Facts (formally Trak 1). Ministry Area Directors are responsible for overseeing that the volunteers and employed staff members they supervise are up-to-date on their training and back ground check.
- Annual review of this policy and procedures to be done by the Trustees, to be completed before charge conference in each calendar year.
- Appropriate documentation of this policy's review to be filed with East Cobb UMC charge conference documents.

Training

The annual training session will include but not be limited to an explanation and discussion of the following topics:

1. East Cobb UMC policies and procedures
2. Behaviors which signal problems
3. Guidelines for prevention
4. Procedures for reporting of alleged abuse and confidentiality
5. Procedure for response
6. Adequate supervision and appropriate discipline
7. Specific age level information

Training Information

Knowing the Facts Regarding Child Abuse

It is important to be familiar with a few statistics concerning the incidence of child abuse:

1. The National Center for Child Abuse and Neglect reports that there are more than two million incidents of physical abuse and/or neglect per year in the U.S. affecting 30 out of every 1,000 children.
2. Studies have estimated that one out of three girls is sexually abused before the age of 18. Similarly, studies indicate that one out of seven boys has been sexually abused before the age of 18. Even more frightening is that these numbers may be underestimated since many children are reluctant to report abuse.
3. The National Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse in the U.S. reports 2,000 deaths attributed to child abuse and/or neglect occur each year. In light of the statistics, it seems that any organization involved with children is a place where abuse could occur.

(Statistics from *Safe Sanctuaries*. Joy Thornburg Melton. Discipleship Resources, 2008. p. 34)

The Profile of a Child Molester

Who is the typical child molester? Often, we assume that molesters are “strangers wearing trench coats” or “dirty old men.” These stereotypes are not only inaccurate, but they dangerously contribute to a false sense of security. Researchers in the field of child sexual abuse currently indicate that no one profile fits the various perpetrators of abuse. Church leaders can become preoccupied with screening stereotypes, while not suspecting the real molester could be an active adult or teen in the church. Consider the following:

- Over 80 percent of the time, the abuser is someone known to the victim;
- Most abuse takes place within the context of an ongoing relationship;
- The usual offender is between the ages of 20 – 30 years;
- 20 percent of sex offenders begin their activity before the age of 18;
- Child abusers are often married and have children.¹

¹ www.ngumc.org/safesanctuaries & www.trak-1.com

What is Abuse?

The depth and breadth of the problem of abuse is far greater than can be effectively addressed within this resource. For our purposes, we must limit our focus to the prevention of abuse in church sponsored ministries.

Types of Abuse

Generally, abuse is categorized in six primary forms:

1. Physical abuse: Abuse in which a person deliberately and intentionally causes bodily harm to a child, youth or vulnerable adult. Examples may include violent battery with a weapon (knife, belt, strap, etc.), burning, shaking, kicking, choking, fracturing bones, and any of a wide variety of non-accidental injuries to a child, youth, or vulnerable adult's body.
2. Emotional abuse: Abuse in which a person exposes a child to spoken and/or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty. Emotional abuse sends a message to the child or youth of worthlessness, badness and being not only unloved, but undeserving of love and care. Children and youth exposed to emotional abuse may have experienced being locked in a closet, being deprived of any sign of parental affection, being constantly told they are bad or stupid, being allowed or forced to abuse alcohol or drugs. Emotional abuse is often very difficult to prove and is devastating to the victim.
3. Neglect and abandonment: Neglect is endangering an individual's health, safety, or welfare. Abandonment is the desertion of a child, youth or vulnerable adult by one who has assumed responsibility for care or custody of that person. Neglect and abandonment may include withholding food, clothing, medical care, education, and even affection and affirmation of the child or youth's self-worth. This is perhaps the most common form of abuse.
4. Sexual abuse: Abuse in which sexual contact between a child or youth and an adult (or another older and more powerful youth) occurs. The child is never truly capable of consenting to or resisting such contact and/or sexual acts. Often, the child or youth is physically and psychologically dependent on the perpetrator of the abuse. Examples of sexual abuse may include fondling, intercourse, incest, and the exploitation of and exposure to pornography or prostitution.
5. Ritual abuse: Abuse in which physical, sexual, or psychological violations of a child, youth or vulnerable adult are inflicted regularly, intentionally, and in a stylized way by a person or persons responsible for the child's welfare. The abuser may appeal to some higher authority or power to justify the abuse. The abuse may include cruel treatment of animals or repeated threats of harm to the child, other persons, and animals. Reports of ritual abuse are often extremely horrifying and may seem too grim to be true. Children, youth or vulnerable adults making such reports must not be ignored.
6. Financial abuse or exploitation: An unauthorized or misuse of funds or property or assets belonging to a vulnerable adult by force, misrepresentation or illegal means. Examples of financial abuse or exploitation are home furnishings disappear, little or no food in the house, complains about things disappearing, can't find money, valuable, or important possessions, checkbook is missing or does not balance.²

² www.ngumc.org/safesanctuaries & www.trak-1.com

Indicators of Abuse

Children, youth and vulnerable adults suffering from abuse often will not tell anyone about it. Therefore, it is important to be able to recognize other signs of abuse. The following characteristics may be indicators of abuse, although they are not necessarily proof. Individually, any one of the indicators may be a sign of a number of other more or less serious problems. When these indicators are observed in a child, youth or vulnerable adult they can be considered as warnings and will lead you to look into the situation further.

Possible Signs of Physical Abuse

1. Hostile and aggressive behavior toward others
2. Fearfulness of parents and/or other adults
3. Destructive behavior toward self, others, and/or property
4. Inexplicable fractures or bruises inappropriate for child or youth's developmental stage
5. Burns, facial injuries, pattern of repetitious bruises

Possible Signs of Emotional Abuse

1. Exhibits severe depression and/or withdrawal
2. Exhibits severe lack of self-esteem
3. Threatens or attempts suicide
4. Speech and/or eating disorders
5. Goes to extremes to seek adult approval
6. Extreme passive/aggressive behavior patterns

Possible Signs of Neglect and Abandonment

1. Failure to thrive, malnutrition
2. Pattern of inappropriate dress for climate
3. Beggars or steals food; chronic hunger
4. Depression
5. Untreated medical conditions
6. Poor hygiene, soiled clothing
7. Signs of being over or under medicated
8. In children, indication that education is neglected

Possible Signs of Sexual Abuse

1. Unusually advanced sexual knowledge and/or behavior for child's age and developmental stage.
2. Depression – cries often and for no apparent reason
3. Promiscuous behavior
4. Difficulty walking or sitting
5. Bruised/bleeding in vaginal or anal areas
6. Exhibits frequent headaches, stomachaches, and/or extreme fatigue
7. Sexually transmitted diseases

Possible Signs of Ritual Abuse

1. Disruptions of memory
2. Unexplained mistrust and mood swings
3. Flashbacks

4. Fear of dark
5. Nightmares or sleep disorders
6. Any of the sexual abuse symptoms

Possible Signs of Financial Abuse or Exploitation

1. Home furnishings disappear
2. Little or no food in the house
3. Complains about things disappearing
4. Can't find money or valuables, important possessions
5. Checkbook is missing or does not balance

In addition to these indicators, children or youth who have been abused at church may exhibit some of the following behaviors:

1. Unusual nervousness or anxiety about being left at a church sponsored ministry
2. Reluctance to participate in church activities that were previously enthusiastically approached
3. Comments such as "I don't want to be alone with _____" in reference to an employed staff member or volunteer
4. Nightmares including an employed staff member or volunteer as a frightening character
5. Unexplained hostility toward an employed staff member or volunteer³

³ www.ngumc.org/safesanctuaries & www.trak-1.com

Older and Vulnerable Adults

While much of this policy addresses the need to protect our children and youth, East Cobb United Methodist Church recognizes that abuse of impaired and older adults is a major concern. Many older adults are also subjected to financial abuse. We must be vigilant for signs of abuse in our adult membership and report any suspected abuse, following the process outlined in this document on page 7. The local Department of Family and Child Services has a division with responsibility for supervising elder care. (DFCS: 1-855-GACHILD)

Elder Abuse Information

- In 2008 there were 39 million older adults
- Projected in 2025, there will be 62 million older adults
- There are reports of 1-2 million cases of abuse
- 67% of abused are women
- 32% of abused are men
- 53% of abusers are women

Hidden Problem in Elder Abuse

- Abusers are most often caregivers elderly depend on for care or protection
- Abusers may or may not be family members

Additional Types of Abuse

- Financial Abuse or Exploitation: Unauthorized use of funds or property belonging to elder by force, misrepresentation or illegal means.

Report of Suspected Abuse

(Use this form for Incent Reporting and Suspected Abuse Reporting)

Name of employed staff member or volunteer observing or receiving disclosure of abuse:

Victim's Name: _____ Victim's Age: _____ Victim's Date of Birth: _____

Date/Place of initial conversation with or report from victim: _____

Victim's Statement (Give a detailed summary. Attach additional sheets as necessary)

Name of person accused of abuse: _____

Relationship of accused to victim (employed staff member, volunteer, family member, etc.): _____

Report to Pastor in Charge

Person taking action: _____ Title/Capacity: _____

Name: _____ Date/Time: _____

Summary: _____

Call to Victim's Parents/Legal Guardian

Person taking action: _____ Title/Capacity: _____

Spoke with: _____ Date/Time: _____

Summary: _____

Call to Children and Family Service Agency (DFCS) 1-855-GACHILD

Person taking action: _____ Title/Capacity: _____

Spoke with: _____ Date/Time: _____

Summary: _____

Call to District Superintendent

Person taking action: _____ Title/Capacity: _____

Spoke with: _____ Date/Time: _____

Summary: _____

Other Contacts

Person taking action: _____ Title/Capacity: _____

Spoke with: _____ Date/Time: _____

Summary: _____

Person taking action: _____ Title/Capacity: _____

Spoke with: _____ Date/Time: _____

Summary: _____

Person taking action: _____ Title/Capacity: _____

Spoke with: _____ Date/Time: _____

Summary: _____

Accident Report Form

(Use this form for Accident Reporting)

Date of Accident: _____ Type of Accident: _____

Name of child/youth injured: _____ Age: _____ Date of Birth: _____

Home address of injured: _____

Location of Accident: _____

Name of Parent (s) or Legal Guardian (s): _____

Witnesses

Name: _____ Date: _____

Name: _____ Date: _____

Name: _____ Date: _____

Description of Accident: _____

Response to the Accident: _____

Name of Person making Report: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____