

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY
SHREVE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
SHREVE, OHIO

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Child Protection Policy of the Shreve United Methodist Church is to:

1. Provide procedures specifically designed to protect children, youth, church staff and volunteers associated with the ministries of the church.
2. Establish appropriate ways of responding to alleged, reported, or suspected incidents of child abuse.
3. Be in a compassionate ministry with all affected persons—the alleged victim, the alleged victim’s family, the accused, the accused’s family, and the church family.

We hereby resolve to put into practice the procedures set forth herein with the intent to:

1. Safeguard the children/ youth of our church from abuse and neglect.
2. Respond to all allegations in a fair and compassionate manner.
3. Protect church staff and volunteers from potential false allegations of abuse.
4. Limit the extent of our church’s legal risk and liability.
5. Strengthen our Christian educational children’s/ youth ministries.

DEFINITION OF ABUSE

“Child abuse” is defined in accordance with current Ohio law. At the time this policy was being written/ adopted, the current law in Ohio defined child abuse to consist of any of the following:

1. Engaging in any sexual activity with a child, as defined under Chapter 2907 of the Ohio Revised Code; or
2. Endangering a child, as defined in Section 2919.22 of the Ohio Revised Code*; or
3. Denial, as a means of punishment, of proper necessary subsistence, education, medical care, or other care necessary to a child for the child’s health; or
4. Use of restraint procedures on a child that cause injury or pain; or
5. Administration of prescription drugs to a child without the written approval and ongoing supervision of a licensed physician; or
6. Providing alcoholic beverages or controlled substances to a child; or
7. Commission of any intentional act that results in any injury or death to a child; or
8. Infliction of physical or mental injury that threatens to harm a child’s health, welfare, or safety.

* In its present form, this law defines “child endangerment” to include any of the following: (1) abuse; or (2) torture or cruel abuse; or (3) corporal punishment or other physical discipline (e.g., such as spankings) or prolonged cruel restraint, which is excessive under the circumstances, and which could likely physically injure the child; or (4) repeated, uncalled-for discipline which, if continued, would seriously impair the child’s mental health or development; or (5) involving the child in any way in any obscene, sexually-oriented, or nudity-oriented activity or conduct.

SELECTION AND SCREENING OF CHURCH STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

In an effort to create a safe environment within our church, each church staff person and volunteer (adult and youth) who works with the church’s children/youth programs either regularly or occasionally, on or beyond the church’s grounds, will be screened and will be trained on child protection issues.

The procedure for selecting and screening is as follows (the Staff Parish Relations Committee may require additional screening, such as criminal background check and performance standards for paid staff):

1. Six Month Rule: Whether a church member or not, every volunteer working with children/youth under age 18 shall have been an active participant in the church for at least six months.
2. Each person being considered to work with children/youth, whether as a volunteer or paid staff person, shall fill out an application form (see attached).
3. Before placing the applicant in a position of responsibility, the pastor, church staff member, or lay person responsible for the ministry will review the written application and determine if the applicant needs to be interviewed. Interviews will follow the interview guidelines provided as an attachment to this policy and be conducted by the pastor, church staff member or lay person responsible for the ministry. Whether or not an interview is conducted, the pastor, church staff member or lay person responsible for the ministry will contact the three references provided on the application form. A written record of such contact will be retained with the application form (see attached).
4. Any person who has been previously convicted or pled guilty or no contest to a crime against children or youth will not be placed in a position involving access to children or youth.

SUPERVISION OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

While recognizing the important role of youth volunteers in children/youth ministries, all activities involving children and youth will be supervised by at least two people who is at least 18 years of age and at least five years older than those they are supervising.

Supervision of Classroom Activities: It is preferable that at least two adults be present for all classroom activities involving children and youth. In cases where only one adult can be present,

other adults should be in close proximity. A designated person should be aware of the children/youth's whereabouts if they leave the classroom area.

Supervision of Non-Classroom Activities: With the exception of the circumstances identified under Special Rules for Supervision of Specific Activities, at least two adults will be present for all non-classroom activities involving children/youth.

Special Rules for Supervision of Specific Activities:

1. **Youth Counseling:** In instances of youth counseling where circumstances dictate that counseling is most effective on a one-on-one basis, a church staff person or volunteer may meet individually with a child or youth with the awareness and previous consent of that individual's parent or legal guardian. Exceptions to consent may be made for emergencies.
2. **Dismissal from Group Events:** In group events, it may be inevitable that one child or youth's transportation from the event arrives after all other children/youth's transportation has arrived. In those circumstances, a child/youth may unavoidably be in the individual presence of an adult. Because this circumstance may be simply unavoidable, the general rule which requires the presence of two adults is suspended and the adult is responsible for exercising his/her best judgment for the child or youth's well-being.
3. **Multi-church events:** All volunteers from other churches supervising children or youth are required to be trained under a child protection policy substantially similar to the Shreve UMC's Child Protection Policy.
4. **Public meetings:** One adult is sufficient if the meeting is in public and parental consent is obtained.

Trip and Retreat Supervision:

There shall be at least two adults present for all trips, retreats, and other times children/ youth gather at or away from the church building. (Please note that at least three adults are preferable so that in the event of an emergency, there will be adequate supervision.)

There shall be at least one adult of each gender present at co-ed overnight events. At single-gender overnight events, at least one of the two or more adults present will be of the same gender as the children/youth.

In situations where two adults are not available per room where children/youth are staying overnight, then no adult should stay alone in a specific room with the children/youth. In those circumstances where adults are not staying in the rooms with children/youth, special measures should be taken to assure the children/youth's safety and supervision, such as adult hall monitors, "taping" doors, and periodic room checks by two adults of the same gender as those being checked. Parents should be made aware of housing accommodations.

Rules for providing transportation for church events:

1. Permission slips, including permission for emergency medical care, shall be carried by the person in charge of each trip or retreat.
2. Church van or bus may be driven only by those on the approved list in the office.
3. All other drivers: must be known to the designated leader of the event; must be at least 21 years old; must have a valid driver's license and proof of insurance.
4. Any driver must be accompanied by at least two children or youth.

Open Door Policy: Parents, volunteers, or staff of the church may visit and observe any children's/youth program at any time.

RESPONSE BY CHURCH WORKERS TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE

If abuse is suspected by, observed by or disclosed to a volunteer and/or paid staff member of the church, that person shall report the incident immediately to the senior pastor. (If the accused is the senior pastor, see information below.) Be prepared to do the following:

1. Immediately notify the proper authorities (children's services board, the county department of human services exercising the children services function, or a local law enforcement agency in the county in which the child resides or in which the suspected abuse occurred. This is required by law. Do not attempt an investigation. This should be left to professionals who are familiar with these cases.
2. Notify the parents of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety of the child/youth until the parent(s) arrive. It is important to emphasize the proper authorities must be notified even if the parent(s) does not wish the incident to be reported.
3. If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, contact the proper authorities, and follow their advice about notification of parents.
4. Take any allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim's family. Extend whatever pastoral resources are needed. Remember that the care and safety of the victim is the first priority.
5. After having reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the incident is to be reported immediately to appropriate legal counsel, the church's insurance company, and the district superintendent. The district superintendent will report the allegation to the bishop's office. Do not try to handle this without professional assistance.
6. If the accused is the senior pastor, the chairperson of the SPR will contact the district superintendent and the appropriate sections of the most recent version of *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* regarding complaints and investigations will be followed.
7. The senior pastor or chairperson of SPR shall keep a written report of all incidents to ensure ongoing ministry to all parties involved. Documents shall be brief, factual, and in permanent ink. They shall be stored securely to maintain confidentiality. The church must also file a copy of the report with the bishop's office of the East Ohio Conference, where it shall remain confidential.

8. Immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the accused, remove the accused from further involvement with children and/or youth.
9. Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the safety of the child or youth is secured, the pastor or other designated person may tell the accused that a report has been made. If the accused is a volunteer or paid staff of the church, that person shall be relieved temporarily of his or her duties until the investigation is finished. If the accused is a paid staff person of the church, arrangements should be made to either maintain or suspend his or her income until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.
10. Re contact with the media: The senior pastor or district superintendent will handle all contact with the media. Care will be taken to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved. The spokesperson will generally convey that the matter is under investigation and any comments made prior to the conclusion of the investigation would be premature.

EDUCATION OF PERSONS WHO WORK WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

The church will provide regularly scheduled training focused on issues of child protection for those working with children and youth. It is expected that all those who are involved in the church's ministry with children and/or youth will take advantage of these training opportunities. The training may include such topics as the definition and recognition of abuse; the church's policies on reporting abuse and appropriate forms; the meaning and importance of confidentiality; the maintenance of a positive learning classroom environment, including appropriate discipline and age-level characteristics; and the appropriate behavior for teachers and leaders.