

Child Protection Policy

Brecksville United Methodist Church

Brecksville, Ohio

I. INTRODUCTION

A central tenet of the Christian faith is the inherent value and worth of all children, youth and adults. The Brecksville United Methodist Church has a responsibility to provide such policies and procedures that respect and protect the inherent value and worth of all persons who participate in worship, Christian education, and Church-related activities. Children are least able to protect themselves in our society and are particularly vulnerable to abuse and neglect.

In April 1996, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child sexual abuse in the Church. The following is an excerpt from that resolution:

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 and sexual exploitation and abuse." Tragically, Churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, exploitation and ritual abuse . . . occur in Churches, both large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural and racial lines God calls us to make our Churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from sexual and ritual abuse.

II. POLICY STATEMENT

In covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we adopt this policy for the prevention of child abuse in our Church, vowing to 1) safeguard the children/youth of our Church from abuse and neglect; 2) fairly, compassionately, and confidentially respond to alleged, reported, and suspected incidents of abuse; 3) protect adults (paid and volunteer) from potential false allegations of abuse; and 4) limit the extent of the Church's legal risk and liability exposure.

The Brecksville United Methodist Church hereby authorizes a Child Protection Policy Task Force (members chosen by the Director of Education) to establish procedures specifically designed to protect children, youth and adults (paid and volunteers) associated with the ministries of the Church. Those procedures will establish the means by which this Child Protection Policy will be implemented and enforced.

Procedures to Support the Child Protection Policy

I. Definition of Abuse

For purposes of the Child Protection Policy and Procedures, *child abuse* is defined as any of the following:

- (1) engaging in any sexual activity with a child (verbal, physical, or visual); or
- (2) endangering a child by engaging in abusive conduct, including but not limited to torture or cruel conduct; corporal punishment or other physical discipline (*e.g.*, such as spankings); physical restraint which is excessive under the circumstances and which could likely physically injure the child or cause pain; repeated, uncalled-for discipline which, if continued, would seriously impair the child's mental health or development; or any obscene, sexually-oriented, or nudity-oriented activity or conduct with the child; or
- (3) punishing a child by denying proper necessary subsistence, education, medical care, or other care necessary for the child's health; or
- (4) administering prescription or over the counter medications or drugs to a child without the written approval and ongoing supervision of a licensed physician; or a parent.
- (5) providing alcoholic beverages or controlled substances to a child; or
- (6) committing any intentional act that results in injury or death to a child; or
- (7) inflicting physical or mental injury that threatens to harm a child's health, welfare, or safety.

II. A. Selection and Screening of Church Staff and Volunteers

Each Church staff person and volunteer who regularly or occasionally works with the Church's children's and youth programs will be screened and trained on child protection issues. The procedure for selection and screening are as follows:

Each person being considered to work with children and/or youth in any Church program, whether as a volunteer or paid staff person, shall fill out an application form (*see* Appendix I).

Before placing the applicant in a position of responsibility, the Director of Education (for children) and the Youth Director (for youth) will review the written application and determine if the applicant will be interviewed. An interview *must* take place if:

- (1) The person is a newcomer to Brecksville United Methodist Church and/or the community;
- (2) The person indicates that their interest is to work alone with children;
- (3) The person has indicated that they have been charged with a crime against children or youth. (*Persons who have 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 child or youth.*);
or
- (4) Upon conducting a background check, issues are raised which require clarification.

Each person applying to work with children and/or youth as a paid staff member of the Church must agree to a County Background Check (ordered and paid for by the Church) or pay for their own BCI background check with fingerprints at the local police station.

Before beginning work with either children or youth, each paid staff member and volunteer will sign a statement that they have read, understand and agree to abide by the Church's Child Protection Policy and Procedures. Volunteers will review the Child Protection Policy every three years and sign the Child Protection Policy Recertification form.

Where it has been determined that an applicant should not work with children or youth, the Church will handle the decision in a confidential and sensitive manner, informing the applicant of the reasons for the decision.

III. Supervision of Children and Youth

General Rule

While recognizing the important role of nonmembers and youth volunteers in children and youth ministries, *all* activities involving children and youth will be supervised by at least one adult (*e.g.*, a person who is at least 18 years of age *and* at least 5 years older than those whom they are supervising) who is either a paid staff member or an active *member* of the Church or has been an active participant for a minimum of six months.

Supervision of Classroom Activities

(1) Birth to Eighth Grade

At least two adult (or one if a paid staff member) members of the Church must be present for all classroom activities involving infants, toddlers, and children in grades K-8. Where the two adults are family members, it is preferable that a third adult be present or a designated third adult will periodically check each classroom.

(2) Grades 9-12

At least one paid staff member or adult member of the Church will be present for all classroom activities. A designated person will periodically check all classrooms. Where two adults are not available to supervise, the classroom doors will remain open or windows left uncovered if closed for noise purposes.

Open Door Policy

Parents, volunteers or staff of the Church may visit and observe all programs and classrooms at any time.

Sign-in/Sign-out Procedure

Adults responsible for children who are infant through toddler will sign in their child and indicate the pre-authorized person(s) to whom the child may be signed out for both Sunday School and other children's activities. Adults responsible for children age 3 through third grade will sign their child out of Sunday School and other children's activities. No child shall ever be left unattended.

Records Retention

All children/youth activities will have a written record of the name of participants and supervisors. Records shall be kept for three years.

Supervision of Non-Classroom Activities

With the exception of the circumstances identified under the Special Rules For Supervision of Specific Activities, Transportation, and Confirmation Mentoring Program, at least two adults will be present for all non-classroom activities involving children and/or youth. Any meetings held in an individual's home must be supervised by at least two adults who are not members of the same family.

Special Rules for Supervision of Specific Activities, Transportation, and Confirmation Mentoring Program

- 1) Individual activities with Staff. Certain circumstances or activities may require that paid staff work with children or youth on a one-on-one basis, including but not limited to counseling, tutoring, music rehearsals, and/or planning for events. In such circumstances, the staff person may meet individually with a child or youth with the knowledge and prior consent of that individual's parent or legal guardian and the knowledge of at least one other staff member. Exceptions to parental consent may be made in the event of an emergency.
- 2) Confirmation Mentoring Program: Adult mentors may meet one on one with Confirmation students, provided they meet in a public place where other adults are present, such as a restaurant or the public library. Mentors may also meet in the Confirmation student's home as long as one of the student's parents is present in the house at the

time of the meeting.

- 3) Dismissal from Group Events: Following group events, it may be inevitable that a child or youth's transportation arrives after all other children/youth have left. In those circumstances, a child/youth may unavoidably be supervised by one adult. Under these circumstances, the general rule requiring 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.
- 4) Transportation: The general rule requiring the presence of two adults is suspended. Where necessary, paid staff persons may transport children or youth to/from church events with the prior permission of the child or youth's parent. For adult volunteers, the following criteria must be met:
 - driver must be known to the designated leader of the event
 - driver must be at least 21 years old
 - driver must have a valid state driver's license for the vehicle being operated
 - driver must have proof of insurance
 - driver must be accompanied by at least two children or youth
 - driver must have read and signed an acknowledgment form indicating that the Child Protection Policy and Procedures have been read and will be followed (see Appendix IV)
 - driver must not deviate from designated route

Trip and Retreat Supervision

There shall be at least two adults (preferably three adults or more) present for all trips, retreats and other events where the children and/or youth gather at or away from the Church building.

There shall be at least one adult for each gender present at co-ed overnight events. At single gender overnight events, at least one of the two or more adults present shall 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, "taped" doors, and periodic room checks by two adults of the same gender as those being checked. Parents should be made aware of housing accommodations.

The person in charge of each trip and/or retreat shall carry permission slips including permission for emergency medical care.

Outside Groups Meeting within the Church Facility

It is recommended that all outside organizations review, and agree to comply with all of the church's child protection policy.

IV. Social Media and Technology

Given the increased use of technology and social media in the life of the church and its individual members, we will follow these guidelines for the use of social media, technology and the internet:

- We will protect the privacy and identity of all children and youth in online writings, postings and discussions.
- Volunteers and staff must not post photos or videos that identify children or youth by name, address, or other specific identification on any online site or printed publication without consent from a parent or legal guardian.
- All social media groups (Facebook, etc.) associated with children or youth should be designated as “closed” groups, requiring all those who wish to gain access to be approved by the group’s administrator(s).
- All church-related social media groups (Facebook, etc.) and pages must have at least two administrators. If an administrator is no longer associated with the ministry, that individual's administrative status must be revoked.
- Photos of children and youth may only be published or posted on social media (Facebook, etc.) after a photo release has been signed or checked off by their parent/guardian. Permission slips should contain a statement that approval to participate in the event includes approval for photographs to be used in church-related media. Photos used in other mediums, such as church newsletters, websites, blogs, Twitter pics, etc., must not include any identifying information of minors without permission.
- Photos may only be posted to the social media (Facebook, etc.) page by page administrators. Adults (staff, volunteers, parents, etc.) should not identify minors in photographs posted online or in print. Individuals (including minors) are welcome to identify (i.e. “tag”) themselves.
- When checking in on Foursquare, Facebook, or any location tagging social media, only “check in” yourself. Never check in minors. Be sensitive to tagging or revealing other participants’ location without their expressed permission. Rather, create a hashtag to facilitate conversation.
- In the case of clergy/staff and church member online connections, friend requests, follow requests, circle requests, etc. should be initiated by the church member, especially if the church member is a minor.
- No adult shall initiate social media (Facebook, etc.) contact with or “friend” a vulnerable person. When accepting the “friend” requests of a vulnerable person, care should be taken to respect the ministry and discipleship work of the local faith community to which they belong. Any conversations on Social Media with a minor shall occur in open channels, or with multiple parties present in the conversation thread.
- When emailing, texting, tweeting, posting or messaging a vminor, adults should copy another adult (ideally a parent or guardian) on the message, or post it in a public venue (i.e. a Facebook wall as opposed to a private message). This will allow adults to maintain the “two adults present” policy standard when using social media. Platforms promising discrete conversations and secrecy (SnapChat, FacebookPoke, etc.) should be

avoided.

- We shall not engage in, encourage or condone cyber-bullying. Every children's ministry group, youth ministry group, and adult volunteer training session is encouraged to include in its teaching a session on the types and consequences of cyber-bullying, including how to identify it and how to report it.
- We shall educate our congregation in the effective and safe use of social media and technology to live out their Christian witness in what they write, post, share, and view.

V. Response by Church Workers to Injuries and Accidents

In order to assure proper attention is given to any child who is injured or involved in an accident, an incident report must be completed by an adult supervisor within 24 hours of the incident (*see* Appendix V). A parent/guardian should be notified within that time.

VI. Response by Church Workers to Allegations of Abuse

Each member of the Church has a legal and moral responsibility to report suspected abuse whenever it comes to our attention regardless of where that abuse takes place. Reporting abuse is a form of ministering to the needs of those crying out for help. If abuse occurs, the Church will act as an advocate for all affected persons, providing support, information, assistance and intervention. The Church will provide a supportive atmosphere, offering both objectivity and empathy as we seek to create a climate in which healing can take place.

If abuse is suspected, observed by or disclosed to a volunteer and/or paid staff member of the Church, that person shall report the incident immediately to the pastor. (If the accused is the pastor, *see* information below.) Be prepared to do the following (please note that these steps should be done simultaneously):

- Immediately notify the proper authorities (local law enforcement agency in which the child resides or in which the suspected abuse occurred or children's services (#216-696-KIDS). *This is a* requirement of State law. (Ohio Revised Code Section 2151.421.) Do not attempt an investigation. This should be left to professionals who are familiar with these cases.
- Simultaneously notify the parent/ guardian 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 that the proper authorities must be notified even if the parent(s) do(es) not wish the incident to be reported. [NOTE: If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, contact the proper authorities. Follow their advice about notification of the parents.]
- Take any allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim's family. Offer care and support to prevent further hurt. Extend whatever pastoral resources are needed. Remember that the

care and safety of the victim is the first priority. Respond in a positive and supportive manner to the alleged victim and the victim's family.

- After having reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the incident is to be reported immediately to the Church's attorney, 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 matter* without professional assistance. If the accused is a clergy member of the annual conference, local pastor, or diaconal minister, provisions of Paragraph 161 I and Paragraph 2702 of *The 2016 Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* must be followed.
- A written report of the basic information shall be kept to ensure on-going ministry to, and advocacy for, victims and others involved (*see Appendix VI*). The report shall be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It shall be filed in a secure place in order to ensure confidentiality. It shall be written in ink or typed to prevent it from being changed. The Church must also file a copy of the report with the Bishop's office of the East Ohio Conference, where it shall be kept confidential.
- Immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the accused, remove the accused from further involvement with children and/or youth.
- Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the safety of the child or youth is secured, the pastor or other designated persons 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/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/her income until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.
- Any contact with the media should be handled by a pre-determined spokesperson. Care will be taken to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved. The spokesperson should generally convey that the matter is under investigation in accordance with the Child Protection Policy and any comments made prior to the conclusion of the investigation would be premature.

VII. Education of Persons who Work With Children and Youth

The Church shall provide training focused on issues of child protection for those working with children and youth.

The training shall include:

The definition and recognition of abuse.

The Church's policy and procedures on reporting abuse and appropriate forms.

The purposes of the policy as protection for children and youth and for adults (paid and volunteer).

The meaning and importance of confidentiality.

The maintenance of a positive learning classroom environment, including appropriate discipline and age-level characteristics.

The appropriate behavior for teachers and leaders.

VI. Contact Information

Brecksville United Methodist Church

65 Public Square

Brecksville, Ohio 44141

(440) 526-8938

Emergency Phone Numbers:

Senior Pastor: Rev. Heidi Welch, (330) 718-9360

Director of Education: Jenny Gee (440) 570-2080

Youth Director: Dana Schwendeman (440) 897-1235

Church Attorney: Alan Scheufler, (216) 574-2600

District Superintendent: Rev. Bruce Hitchcock 216-441-4527

East Ohio Conference Bishop's Office: 1-800-831-3872/330-499-3972

Church Insurance Agent: Gregory Skaljic, Luce Smith & Scott Inc

6880 W. Snowville Road, Suite 220

Brecksville OH 44141, 440-746-1700

Brecksville Police Department: (440) 526-8900

Broadview Heights Police Department: (440) 526-5400

Cuyahoga County Child Abuse Reporting: (216) 696-5437

Media Spokesperson: Susan C. Hastings, Esq. (216) 470-6017

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