



Safe

Sanctuaries

Policy & Procedures

Reducing the Risk of
Child Abuse in the Church

Safe Sanctuaries Policy & Procedures
Guidelines for workers with children and/or youth

The “Two-Adult” Rule (the significance of this rule cannot be overstated) requires no fewer than two adults present at all times during a church-sponsored program, event, or ministry involving children. The nursery is always attended by at least two adults. A Sunday school class for children is always led by at least two adults. A bible study group for youth is always taught by at least two adults. The youth fellowship group is always staffed with at least two adult counselors/leaders.

Abusers thrive on secrecy, isolation, and their ability to manipulate victims. When abusers know they will never have a chance to be alone with potential victims, they quickly lose interest in “working” with the children. Another way of enhancing this rule is by using assigned adult “roamers” who move in and out of rooms.

First Aid/CPR Training Offering first aid and CPR training on an annual basis for all church workers with children and youth is a basic step to ensure the safety of children. A list of those individuals with First Aid/CPR training will be provided.

Annual Orientation for Workers All workers with children and youth, whether the workers are paid, volunteer, part-time, full-time, clergy, or lay, shall be required to attend an orientation session in which they are informed of the:

- Churches policies for the prevention of child abuse.
- Procedures to be used in all ministries with children and youth.
- Appropriate steps to report an incident of child abuse.
- Details of the state laws regarding child abuse.

At this orientation the workers are given an opportunity to renew their covenant to abide by and cooperate with the church’s policies and procedures. The church will have an updated record that it has informed all of its workers about the policies. Workers who do not attend will be contacted and asked to renew the covenant.

The “Five-Years-Older” Rule Often, especially in youth ministry, the people who volunteer to work or who apply for a paid position are in college or have just graduated. If a junior in college (age 20 or 21) is recruited to serve as a counselor in the senior-high youth fellowship, the counselor would be “leading” youth who are only three or four years younger than he or she is. This shall be prohibited for the protection of the youth and the worker.

No Workers under the Age of Eighteen When a church implements this rule it goes a long way toward reducing the risks of injuries to its children and youth. A very common practice in churches is to allow junior-high and senior-high aged volunteers in the church nursery. While in some situations they may provide excellent help, people under the age of eighteen cannot be expected to have developed the maturity and judgment that is needed to be fully responsible for younger children. Putting children in charge of children invites disaster. Therefore no Junior high or Senior High aged volunteers will be in charge of a group of children or youth.

Windows in All Classroom Doors Each room set aside for children and youth will have a door with a window in it. A window in every door removes the opportunity for secrecy and isolation, conditions every child abuser seeks. Many pastors are adding a window in their study or office door to set a good example for the church and to protect themselves against false allegations of misconduct.

Open-Door Counseling At a counseling session(s) with children or youth, the door of the room used should remain open for the entire session. Ideally, the session will be conducted at a time when others are nearby, even if they are not within listening distance. Counseling sessions conducted behind closed doors are a breeding ground for false allegations of abuse.

Advance Notice to Parents A basic rule for ministry with children and youth is to always give parents advance notice and full information regarding the events(s) in which their children will be participating. Risk management officers advise clients to notify parents of any event in which a worker will be alone with a child. Doing this protects the church in that it proves that parents were informed of the event, given knowledge of the situation, and given the chance to remove their child from being alone with a worker.

Participation Covenant for All Participants and Leaders A written covenant of participation has been developed and provided to all leaders and participants in children's and youth ministries. The covenant is a statement in which the participants and leaders agree to:

- Take part in the ministry.
- Give their best efforts to the ministry.
- Respect the other participants.
- Treat the others as well as they would wish to be treated.

Parent and Family Education St. Marks UMC has made serious commitment to a comprehensive plan for the prevention of child abuse within its ministries. It will provide information about the plan to the congregation and parents.

Appropriate Equipment and Supervision Our ministries with children and youth are carried out in an endless variety of settings and locations: church sanctuaries, classrooms, camp cabins, playgrounds, retreat centers, tour buses, parks, and homes. Reports indicate that abuse happens in an equally large variety of settings. One aspect of planning for the safety of children and youth participants is arranging for the ministry to take place in an appropriate setting.

Examples include Bible Study in a classroom at church, in an open-doored classroom and in the presence of no fewer than two adults. Planning for their safety is a necessary part of your ministry with youth and children.

Adequate Insurance for the Scope of Our Ministry Our church is involved in ministries that may include transporting children and/or youth in motor vehicles. Our Board of Trustees has carefully considered all ministries and works with our insurance agent to secure adequate coverage for our ministries. In addition, staff and/or volunteers working with our children and youth will need to provide information on their volunteer application form concerning their ability to transport others safely; including providing a copy of their liability insurance.

For Definition purposes:

- This definition constitutes a lead teacher; An adult at least 5 years older than the age level or group they will be working with.
- The definition of a Youth Helper is any person in grades 8 through 12 approved by the Commission on Education.
- Children are persons from birth through grade 6.