

Rehoboth United Methodist Church
Safe Sanctuaries Policy
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Rehoboth UMC seeks to create a safe environment for children (birth-5th grade), youth (6th-12th grade), and vulnerable persons in which opportunities for abuse are minimized by the provision of proper enlistment and supervision of those persons working with them. This document contains theological foundations, definitions of abuse and policies related to prevention, response, and reporting.

I. Theological foundation

Our Biblical/Baptismal Mandate:

“Then Jesus took a little child and put her among them; and taking her in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.’” (Paraphrase of Mark 9:36-37) Jesus also said, “If any of you put a stumbling block before 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) The Church, above all institutions, is called to welcome and nurture the child. Our goal is to maintain a safe, secure, loving place where all children may grow and where those who care for them may minister their needs in responsible ways.

Our Mandate:

The 1996 General Conference approved a resolution that called upon local churches and annual conferences to institute policies and procedures to reduce the risk of child sexual abuse in our churches and church-related activities. We, in the Tennessee Conference, accept the nature of this call and seek to expand it to include all forms of abuse and neglect that could be possible in these settings or that could come to our attention regarding all children, youth, and/or vulnerable persons in our care.

Statement of Covenant:

As caring Christians, we are committed to protect and advocate for all children, youth, and vulnerable persons participating in the life of the church. The Church, at all levels of its organization, is entrusted with the responsibility of providing an emotionally and physically safe, spiritually grounded, healthy environment for all children, youth, adults, and vulnerable persons in which they are protected from abuse.

We uphold the idea that to report abuse is to be a witness to the world of the love and justice of God and fully recognize that reporting abuse is a form of ministering to the needs of those crying out for help. Simply, to report abuse can help to stop existing abuse and prevent further abuse.

Additionally, we care for victims of abuse and their families by offering resources that will contribute to healing. Further, we recognize the grace God gives in upholding Christian community; we will look for grace-filled ways of dealing with both the victim and the accused.

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 persons. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; we will implement prudent operation procedures in all programs and events; we will educate all of our workers with children, youth and vulnerable person regarding the use of all appropriate policies and methods (including first aid methods and 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.

II. Training

Safe Sanctuaries Training for volunteers is conducted in person annually, giving volunteers an opportunity to obtain and fill out necessary paperwork (if needed), participate in training, and ask appropriate questions. Additionally, Safe Sanctuaries Training is offered in an accessible online format. This format allows volunteers to participate in training, complete an evaluation, and download, fill out, and return necessary paperwork in order to satisfy the requirement. While there is an annual training conducted, Safe Sanctuaries Applications are accepted on a rolling basis, background checks completed as needed, and volunteer approval given throughout the year.

III- Common Definitions of Abuse

1. **Child abuse** (under age 18) is the harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare by a person responsible for the child's health or welfare or by a person in a position of trust, which harm occurs or is threatened through non-accidental physical or mental injury or sexual abuse.
2. **Vulnerable Persons abuse** is the harm or threatened harm to a vulnerable person's health or welfare by a person responsible for the vulnerable person's health or welfare or by a person in a position of trust, which harm occurs or is threatened through non-accidental physical or mental injury or sexual abuse. A vulnerable person is any adult aged 18 or over who, by reason of mental or other disability, age, illness or other situation is permanently or for the time being unable to take care of him or herself, or to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation.
3. **Physical Abuse** is any non-accidental act that inflicts bodily harm to a person, or failure to protect from physical harm where a duty exists to do so.
4. **Neglect** is failure to provide for physical survival needs (such as nutrition, medical, surgical, or any other care necessary for the well-being of any child, youth, or vulnerable person) to the extent that there is harm, or risk of harm, to health or safety.
5. **Sexual Abuse** is any involvement of a child, youth or vulnerable person in intentional sexual acts or sexual conduct that produces sexual arousal or gratification for the perpetrator or sexual behaviors/situations in which there is a sexual component. Sexual abuse includes, without limitation, sexual contact or sharing of sexually explicit language, gestures, or images by a volunteer or staff person with, or directed to, a child, youth or vulnerable person.

6. **Verbal Abuse** refers to spoken or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty against a child, youth, and/or a vulnerable person.

IV. Screening Procedures for Volunteers and Paid Staff

All persons, including staff who intend to work with children, youth, and/or vulnerable persons at Church-sponsored events, including overnight or longer events, must be properly screened, attend an age-appropriate orientation/training session on child protection and abuse, and have a current background check. A Safe Sanctuaries Covenant, Application Form, and Consent to Background Check will be completed and submitted to the appropriate leadership prior to participation.

The following procedures should be followed:

- A written job description outlining duties and expectations for all paid employees must be provided, and all shall be signed and dated by each person falling within scope of the policy.
- An application/personal information form shall be completed. Additionally, for any applicant who is not a current member of Rehoboth UMC or who has not been a member for at least six months, three personal references will be required. The Safe Sanctuaries Ministry Staff Person will check these references using the Safe Sanctuaries Volunteer Reference Check Form.
- A Sexual Offender Registry check in any state where the applicant has resided during the past seven (7) year shall be conducted.
- Consent to a criminal background check. A background check should be provided for all potential volunteers
- A new background check should be performed every 3 years.
- If the applicant is found to have been involved in an activity in which the applicant abused or exploited children, youth, or vulnerable persons the applicant will not be approved. Any conviction of a crime against children, youth, or adults from vulnerable populations and any conviction of rape, sexual or physical assault shall disqualify any applicant. A person who has been convicted as a sex offender will not be approved. Affirmative responses to questions relating to crimes involving possession or use of drugs or suspension of a drivers' license with the past five years will prompt a heightened review of an application.

V. Reporting of Incidents

Incidents may involve inappropriate behavior by staff/volunteers or other participants toward a participant, and call for immediate on-site corrective action. Incidents may involve the abuse, neglect, or exploitation of participants by staff/volunteers or other participants and mandate reporting through the Tennessee Child Abuse hotline (1-800-237-0004) or the Adult Protective Services hotline (1-888-277-8366). In a case of an emergency, immediately call 9-1-1.

A call to the hotline is required to be made by staff/volunteers if there is reasonable cause to the suspect that abuse of a participant has occurred. When the necessity of reporting occurs, the protection of children, youth, and vulnerable persons must be paramount. Cooperation with the Tennessee Department of Children's services, the Tennessee Commission on Aging and Disability, and law enforcement is required in all such incidents.

In case of allegations of abuse occurring in the church or ministries affiliated with the church or having the potential to impact the ministry of the church, the District Superintendent and/or Bishop shall be notified immediately. The Safe Sanctuaries Ministry Staff Person (ex: Director of Children's Ministry) will also be notified following notification of the appropriate state or local law enforcement authorities. Parents or legal guardians will generally be notified; however, in circumstances in which the parent or guardian is alleged or suspected to be the perpetrator, or may have been complicit in the neglect or abuse, notice may be withheld. When doubt exists legal counsel should be consulted.

VI. Statement to the Media:

Statement to the media will be designated by the Senior Pastor and/or District Superintendent.

VII. Fundamental Safe Sanctuaries Procedures:

1. **Appropriate Boundaries:** All persons, staff and participants, will maintain boundaries appropriate to their specific roles, age, and relations to another as defined in Safe Sanctuaries training.
2. **Two Adult Rule:** At least two Safe Sanctuaries Approved Volunteers should be present during all ministry events such that no one adult will be alone with any number of children, youth, or vulnerable persons. At least two of the adults present should be non-related and non-cohabitating. For small group activities where there is only one adult to supervise one group, two or more groups are to meet in sight and sound of each other. The Safe Sanctuaries Ministry Staff Person may also decide to combine groups to ensure the safety of all parties. Small group sizes will be determined by the size of the group, but should not exceed reasonable adult/participant ratios. For overnight events, if both genders are represented, both genders of adults should also be represented.
3. **Floater Rule:** This rule allows only one primary or secondary worker to be in a classroom when there is another approved primary worker floating through the building regularly. When utilizing this rule, the classroom door must remain open at all times. This rule is to be used sparingly and at the discretion of a Safe Sanctuaries Ministry Staff Person.
4. **Five year Older Rule:** Persons supervising children and/or youth will be at least 18 years old and will be at least 5 years older than the oldest child/youth participant.
5. **Open Doors:** Doors to meeting spaces without windows must remain open when children, youth or vulnerable persons are utilizing the space. Doors with window may remain closed if sight lines to all areas of the room are clear.
6. **Building Rule:** Youth (6th-12th grade), vulnerable persons, and the parent/guardians or approved teachers accompanying children (birth-5th grade) are encouraged to use the bathroom facility closest to them. Children are not permitted to go anywhere outside their meeting space unless accompanied by a parent/guardian or approved volunteer in open view. At no time should a child, youth, or vulnerable person be alone in the church unattended.

7. **Medical Release/Registration/Participation Forms:** Each ministry area is responsible for collecting medical, registration, consent forms at the start of each program year. The Safe Sanctuaries Ministry Staff Person will provide these forms.

8. **Transportation:** When transporting children, youth, and/or vulnerable persons to and from church sponsored events in one vehicle, two Safe Sanctuaries approved volunteers should be present. When utilizing two vehicles, it is permissible for one Safe Sanctuaries approved volunteer to be in each vehicle with no less than three total persons (It is not permissible for a volunteer and a child, youth, or vulnerable person to be in a vehicle alone). These two vehicles must caravan (one following directly behind one another on the same route; if one pulls over, the second vehicle pulls over, etc.) to and from the event.