

Bridgewater United Methodist Church Safe Sanctuary Policy

The Administrative Board of Bridgewater United Methodist Church approved implementing a Safe Sanctuary Policy in April 2005. The purpose of the policy is threefold:

1. to demonstrate our steadfast commitment to the physical safety, emotional health, and spiritual growth of our children (age 0 – 18) and vulnerable adults,
2. to protect our staff, both paid and volunteer, from potential wrongful allegations of abuse, and
3. to limit the extent of legal liability of our church.

To achieve this purpose, the following five components will be implemented:

PART ONE: SCREENING & SELECTION

Background checks, application forms, participant covenant forms, reference checks.

PART TWO: SUPERVISION & PROCEDURES

Day-to-day operating procedures, including Two-Adult Rule, 5-Years-Older Rule, and open classroom doors or windows on doors.

PART THREE: TRAINING & EDUCATION

Training and education for staff & volunteers, for adult members of the congregation, and for the children.

PART FOUR: REPORTING

Procedures for reporting allegations of abuse.

PART FIVE: RESPONDING

Procedures for responding to allegations of abuse.

PART ONE: SCREENING AND SELECTION

1. All employees of Bridgewater United Methodist Church must:
 - complete an application for employment form (with three references)
 - undergo a criminal background check

- complete a participant covenant form
 - read the BUMC Safe Sanctuaries Handbook (includes policy and related procedures)
2. All volunteers who work with children (age 0 – 18) and/or vulnerable adults will be required to:
 - complete a volunteer application form (with three references)
 - complete a participant covenant form
 - read the BUMC Safe Sanctuaries Handbook (includes policy and related procedures)

PART TWO: SUPERVISION & PROCEDURES

- **Two-Adult Rule.** Adults are persons 18 years of age or older. Two adults (whom we suggest are not related) should be on site at all times during any church-sponsored program, event, or ministry involving children or vulnerable adults. This will include our nursery, Sunday school classes, music programs, youth programs, and any other programs where children are present. An exception may be made when transporting children during a church-sponsored event as outlined below:
 - Driver must be between 21 and 80 years of age and fulfill the requirements of the BUMC Vehicle Policy.
 - Driver must have proof of insurance and a valid state driver's license.
 - At no time may a driver be alone with an unrelated child unless the parent of the child has provided written permission for transportation.
- **Five-Years-Older Rule.** All staff, counselors, mentors, and volunteers supervising an event involving our children must be at least five-years older than the children with whom s/he is working.
- **Nursery Log.** All infants, toddlers, and children using the nursery must be signed in and out by a parent or guardian.
- **Diaper Changing Procedure.** Nursery staff or volunteers may change soiled diapers as long as another adult is present. All diaper

changes will be recorded in a log using the following format: "time, name of child needing diaper change, provider who changed diaper." At the end of the event, the parent or guardian will be informed that a diaper has been changed.

- **Bathroom Procedure.** A child needing to use the toilet shall be escorted by an adult to the bathroom. The adult shall remain in the hallway while the child uses the toilet. If assistance is requested by the child, the adult may enter and assist. The adult will then log the event using the following format: "time, name of child who requested help, provider who gave help." At the end of the event, the parent or guardian will be informed that bathroom assistance was requested by the child and provided.
- **Open Door Counseling.** During any counseling session with children, the door of the room used shall remain open for the entire session. In addition, the session shall occur when others are nearby (even if not in hearing distance).
- **Parental Consent Forms.** Parental consent forms will be obtained for overnight activities at the church and activities off church property.
- **Windows on classroom and office doors.** All classroom and office doors shall have windows allowing visibility.

PART THREE: TRAINING & EDUCATION

BUMC staff and volunteers will be trained in this policy and the related procedures. Adult members of the BUMC community and the children will be educated about the issue of abuse and this policy.

Training and Educating Staff and Volunteers

Training will be coordinated/performed by the ministry director(s) and/or Senior Pastor (or responsible person in charge), then performed on an annual basis or when a new staff member is hired or volunteer is invited to be in service. The training will include:

- review of the BUMC Safe Sanctuary Policy and related procedures

SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY

- definitions of abuse (in all its forms)
- recognizing the signs of abuse
- the causes and consequences of abuse
- review of the BUMC Safe Sanctuary Policy and related procedures.

All staff and volunteers will sign a form indicating that they have read and understand the Safe Sanctuary Policy and related procedures and that they will abide by the requirements of the policy.

Educating Adult Members of the Congregation

- Send a letter to the congregation explaining the development of the policy and its importance for the welfare of the BUMC community.
- Prepare articles for the newsletter highlighting our Safe Sanctuary theme and the issue of abuse and ways to prevent.
- Designate one Sunday annually in September or October and develop worship around the Safe Sanctuary theme.
- Incorporate resources from DYFS and other agencies that address the issues of abuse.
- Provide all members of the congregation with a copy of the Safe Sanctuary Policy.
- Post the Safe Sanctuary Policy on the BUMC website.

Educating Children

- Designate one Sunday annually in September or October and educate children (using age appropriate materials) during Sunday school on the topic of physical safety and abuse.

PART FOUR: REPORTING

State law requires that anyone who has reason to believe that a child has been abused or neglected must report it immediately to the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS). Failure to do so may result in criminal prosecution.

If suspected abuse is observed by or reported to a staff member or volunteer, the following actions should take place.

- If observed, immediately remove the child or vulnerable adult from the situation.
- Contact DYFS Hotline (1-800-792-8610).

- Report the incident immediately to the staff person responsible for sponsoring the activity (the staff member shall contact the Senior Pastor who will contact the chairperson of the Staff Parish Relations Committee and the district superintendent).
- Complete an incident form, taking detailed notes and provide these to the staff member in charge of the activity.

PART FIVE: RESPONDING

A quick, compassionate and unified response to an alleged incident of child abuse is expected. All allegations will be taken seriously. In all cases of reported or observed abuse in an activity, all volunteers or staff involved in that activity shall be at the service of all official investigating agencies.

- The person(s) who are the subject of any report will be removed from any activities with children or vulnerable adults until the incident is resolved.
- The Senior Pastor, or his/her designee, is the only person authorized to make statements to representatives of the media.
- If the allegation concerns activities or persons outside any relationship to a church related event or activity, it is the responsibility of the person in charge of that event or activity to make the initial contact with the Division of Youth and Family Services and to inform the Senior Pastor.
- The Senior Pastor, or his/her designee, will work with the parent(s)/guardian(s) of the victim of the abuse to determine the appropriate pastoral care.



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