

Trinity United Methodist Church of Hummelstown
Safe Sanctuary Policy for the Protection of Children
Updated – November, 2011

Introduction:

The General Conference of the United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child abuse in the church. The adopted resolution calls all churches to welcome children and also to make our churches safe places for children to grow and learn. It is our responsibility to be proactive in our recruiting and training people with a gift of caring for children. It is also our responsibility to oversee all programs involving children to make sure there is a safe environment and to have a plan of response in place should an accusation arise. The General Conference resolution affirmed that every local church shall have a policy in place for protecting children.

Purpose:

Trinity United Methodist Church's purpose for establishing this Child Abuse Protection Policy and accompanying procedure is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical and spiritual growth of all our children and youth. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers, and we will be responsible in overseeing our programs and events. We will report and respond to all suspected incidents of abuse as is required by state law. There are four parts to our comprehensive plan: Screening, Supervision, Reporting, and Response Plan.

Definitions:

“Adult” means a person 18 years of age or older.

“Child” means any persons under the age of 18.

“Staff person” means any person employed by the Church who is responsible for children's activities.

“Volunteer” means a person 18 years of age or older who assists in conducting children's activities under the supervision of a staff person.

“Church” means Trinity United Methodist Church, Hummelstown

“Persons required to report child abuse” means persons who, in the course of their employment, occupation, or practice of their profession, come into contact with children.

“Child abuse” as defined under Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Law means any of the following:

a. Any recent act or failure to act by a perpetrator which causes non-accidental serious physical injury to a child under 18 years of age.

- b. An act or failure to act by a perpetrator which causes non-accidental serious mental injury to or sexual abuse or sexual exploitation of a child under 18 years of age.
- c. Any recent act, failure to act, or series of acts or failures to act by a perpetrator which creates an imminent risk of serious physical injury or sexual exploitation of a child under 18 years of age.
- d. Serious physical neglect by a perpetrator constituting prolonged and repeated lack of supervision or the failure to provide the essentials of life, including adequate medical care, which endangers a child's life or development or impairs a child's functioning.

No child shall be deemed to be physically or mentally abused based on injuries that resulted solely from environmental factors that are beyond the control of the parent or person responsible for the child's welfare such as inadequate housing, furnishings, income, clothing and medical care.

Screening Procedures:

All adults, volunteers, or staff persons who have regular and direct contact with children shall be required to:

- a. fill out an application that includes: standard contact information, experience, and qualifications for the position, and listing of three non-related references with complete contact information.
- b. demonstrate an active relationship with the Church for at least six months.
- c. complete an application for a Trak 1 report (covers multi-state Criminal Record Check and Child Abuse Clearance).

All current staff persons and volunteers will submit to the screening procedures prescribed by this Policy, with the exception of (a), filling out an application. All new volunteers, persons who have a break in service of one or more years, and those with three or more years since their last background check, shall submit to the screening procedures, including a-c.

All forms and references shall be kept as part of the applicants personnel file. All files should be kept in a confidential manner.

The staff person in charge of the children's activities and/or their designee is responsible for reviewing and following up on each application prior to service, including holding an interview with the potential volunteer. In the event that a follow up to a reference is contacted by phone rather than by a writing being submitted by the reference, notes of the conversation should be included in the personnel file.

All forms filled out by the volunteers and employees will be reviewed by the head of the program and/or the related Committee, as deemed necessary by the head of the program. In the case of a report of suspicious activity, the response team and the appropriate legal authorities will have access to the information.

Supervision:

The second step for providing a safe place for children is supervision of all workers. Supervision of volunteers and staff persons shall include the following procedures:

a. Training is required for all volunteers and staff persons working with children in a supervisory capacity. Training shall include an orientation to this policy, as well as information on how to identify and report child abuse. Training will be offered bi-annually; any volunteer unable to attend the training shall receive training individually from the Director of Children's Ministries.

b. All children's activities shall be supervised by two unrelated adults. "The two adult rule" requires that no matter the size of the group, there will always be two unrelated adults present. This may include the presence of an adult "floater" who moves in and out of the rooms. The supervising adult and the floater will both have completed the background checks.

c. No person shall supervise an age group unless he/she is at least five years older than the children with who he or she is working.

d. Each room or space where children are being cared for shall have a window in the door or the door shall be left open whenever possible. All activities should occur in open view.

e. Registration materials for activities in which children are outside of the direct supervision of their parents/guardians shall require written permission forms which include pertinent health information.

f. All participants who can understand a covenant shall sign a participation covenant listing rules and expectations for the trip in question.

Reporting:

According to PA State law, all workers with children, paid or unpaid, are required to report any suspected child abuse. The only possible exception to this is the clergy privilege (42 Pa. C.S.A. section 5943). Once an incident of child abuse occurs or allegation of an incident is made, it must be dealt with immediately and in a clearly outlined manor.

The staff person or volunteer who observes alleged child abuse or signs of abuse or to whom such alleged child abuse is reported shall report the incident immediately to the staff person in charge of the children's activity. The staff person shall then obtain information necessary such as the name of the alleged victim and his or her address and family information. The staff person shall then notify one of the Pastors of the Church, and shall call the PA Childline and Abuse Registry (1-800-932-0313) to make a report. The staff person shall then send the completed PA CY 47 form to the local Children and Youth Services agency. This line of reporting shall be followed in all such incidents.

Other than is required by the Child Protective Services Law or as directed by law enforcement officials, nothing in this reporting procedure shall prevent the Church from conducting its own investigation of an allegation by employment or volunteer participation services. The church may forego its own investigation in reliance on the investigation being performed by law enforcement or Children and Youth Services.

Persons who are the objects of the report will be required to refrain from all child care activities until the Church's investigation is complete. In any removal of a person from any children's activities, care should be taken to handle this in a discreet manner, recognizing that an investigation is still being conducted.

Response Plan:

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 alleged child abuse, the staff person in charge of the children's activities and the Senior Pastor shall be at the service of all investigative agencies.

The Senior Pastor or his/her designee is the only person authorized to make statements to representatives of the media. All requests for statements should be directed to the Senior Pastor. A spirit of cooperation in directing the media to the official spokesperson is helpful.

If the allegation is against a Church staff person or volunteer or if it occurred in the course of a church activity, the staff person in charge of the activity and the Senior Pastor and/or the Associate Pastor should be contacted immediately. The Senior Pastor or the Associate Pastor shall advise the Church's insurance carrier.

If the allegation is against a Church staff person who would normally be responsible for reporting an incident under the terms of this policy, the responsibility for reporting an incident under the terms of this policy shall be assumed by another Church staff person who is not the subject of the report.

In any case, pastoral support will be available to all persons involved with the incident in question.