

Safe Sanctuary Policy

Bellevue United Methodist Church

Policies and Procedures

When the disciples tried to keep the children away from Jesus, he was quick to respond, “Let the children come to me.” Jesus taught that children were to be included and provided for within the community of faith. Today, the church may be the only place where some children find the unconditional love and care they so desperately need to grow and thrive. As Christians, we must take our responsibilities to our children very seriously. We fail in our responsibilities if we neglect to take adequate precautions against abuse in our churches. It is unlikely that we can completely prevent child abuse in every situation, but it is possible for us to greatly reduce the risk by following a thorough, practical policy of prevention. This policy is designed to set procedures for the safety of the children and youth of Bellevue United Methodist Church. This is based on our understanding of the widespread problem of abuse throughout our country.

Requirements For Staff and Volunteers

- All paid staff and volunteers working with children and youth will be interviewed and written permission will be received for a national criminal background check prior to that person assuming a position with our church.
- Those volunteers working with children (18 or under) should be church members for 6 months before they are eligible.
- Whenever reasonable, the “Two Person Rule” will require no fewer than two non-related adults or leaders be present during any church-sponsored program, event, or ministry involving children or youth.
- For field trips or off-site overnight stays, youth and children shall not stay in a private room with any adult not a member of their family.
- The church nursery will require all parents to sign their child in and out, according to the church nursery policy.
- No one shall serve as a volunteer or paid care provider who has had a verdict or judgment rendered against him or her in any action arising out of any personal act or conducts related to abuse of a child or an adult with special needs. This qualifying rule shall apply no matter how long ago the civil or criminal verdict occurred and judgment was rendered, even if the same is expunged.
- No one shall serve the congregation who, in the opinion of the screening committee, may represent a potential threat of committing abuse or violating this policy.
- Disclosure of findings shall remain private to the committee and will not be revealed to the applicant or to any agent of the applicant.
- Community groups will be asked to sign a statement acknowledging compliance with BUMC’s Safe Sanctuary policy.

SCREENING PROCESS

Responsibility:

- No volunteer or applicant shall begin working with children and youth before completion of the required background check and screening process.
- The Senior Pastor and/or a representative from SPRC will be responsible for screening all paid staff employees.
- The Director of Christian Education will be responsible for screening all Sunday School and Children's Programs volunteers, including the Nursery Ministries and Youth program volunteers.
- The Director of Music Ministries will be responsible for all volunteers in the Music Ministries area.
- Community groups will not be screened by BUMC but are responsible for ensuring compliance with our Safe Sanctuary policy while using our facility.

Procedure:

- The persons noted above will be responsible for receiving, reviewing, confirming and processing employment or volunteer applications.
- References will be required on all employees; the screeners noted above, will follow up on specific references listed, which will include at least three nonrelated references, personal or institutional.
- A check for arrest and conviction records will be made for all employees and volunteers, performed by the persons noted above. All BUMC background checks will be handled through the Tennessee Annual Conference.
- The interview questions may vary depending on the interviewee and the recipient's responsibilities within the Church. The results of the interview, especially when sensitive areas have been discussed, should be kept confidential and only discussed with those persons needing this information in order to make a decision as to whether the applicant should be accepted as a volunteer.
- The volunteer or worker application and consent to perform background check will be signed by the applicant and maintained in secure files.
- The maintenance of such documents shall reside in a locked file or cabinet in the office of the Senior Pastor.

TRAINING

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

This will include a review of the policies and procedures. The consent form for background checks will be signed at that time.

- Community Groups, as described previously, will not receive any training from BUMC.

RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS/MISCONDUCT

- Once an incident of child abuse occurs or allegations of an incident are made, it is crucial that it be dealt with speedily and in a clearly outlined manner. The person who observes alleged abuse or to whom such alleged abuse is reported shall report the incident immediately to the senior pastor.
- Upon receiving such information, the Senior Pastor or his/her designee will speak to the alleged victim immediately and promptly report the incident to the District Superintendent, appropriate authorities, and our insurance agent.
- Persons who are the objects of the report will be required to refrain from the participation in any supervisory capacity of any activity until the incident report is resolved. In any removal of a person from any activities, care should be taken to handle this in a discreet manner, recognizing that an investigation is still being conducted.

SAFE SANCTUARY --- RESPONSE PLAN:

- A quick, compassionate and unified response to an alleged incident of 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 investigation agencies.
- The Senior Pastor, or his/her designee, is the only person (s) authorized to make statements to representatives of the media.
- If the allegation concerns activities or person 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 inform the senior pastor who will then report to the District Superintendent, appropriate authorities, and our insurance agent.
- If allegations are made against the Senior Pastor, the chairperson of the Staff Parish Relations Committee shall be contacted immediately for notification of the District Superintendent.
- All prospective volunteers will read the above summary. Then complete all appropriate applications including approval for a criminal background records check and references. A complete and detailed policy is available in the church office. All volunteers are also asked to sign the Participation Covenant Statement.

Implementation:

This policy shall be effective immediately upon adoption by the Staff-Parish Relations Committee and Board of Trustees at a time stated by them for all Church-related activities, events and functions. All initial training is to be completed by a schedule adopted by SPRC, with ongoing training as needed for new volunteers and employees.

Definitions:

For this policy, the following definitions will apply:

Abuse means harm or threatened harm to the health and welfare of an adult with special needs, a child, or youth by any person responsible for the health and welfare of an adult with special needs, a child or youth, that occurs through non-accidental physical or mental injury; sexual abuse, sexual exploitation or mistreatment, sexual harassment, sexual conduct, sexual molestation; disseminating, exhibiting, or displaying sexually explicit material.

Adult means any person at least 18 years of age.

Appropriate means conduct that one would reasonably assume would be acceptable and permissible by a child's parent or guardian.

Child, Children or Youth refer to a person less than 18 years of age.

Leader means anyone directly responsible for supervising and overseeing the specific Church-related function, event or activity.

Parent or guardian means any parent, stepparent, foster parent, grandparent or appointed guardian with the general responsibility for the health, education, or welfare of a child or adult with special needs.

Sexual Harassment means any unwanted sexual advances or demand, either verbal or physical, which is perceived by the recipient as demeaning, intimidating or coercive.

Screening Committee shall be comprised of the Senior Pastor, the Director of Christian Education and the Director of Music Ministries. The chair of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee and/or others may be members if so recommended by the Senior Pastor.

Building Requirements:

All offices and classroom doors will have an uncovered window. Any counseling that occurs behind a closed door should allow for the viewing of the counselor through the office door window.

Revisions:

- The SPRC and/or Board of Trustees will review this policy annually.
- Proposed revisions shall be submitted in writing to the Trustees, who shall have the power to adopt such revisions as needed.