

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42

THE MINIMUM STANDARDS

The Minimum Standards set forth below have been established by the Upper New York Annual Conference for all ministries. They are mandatory. They are not inspirational, but set minimum standards to protect children, youth, and vulnerable adults from abuse and exploitation. Without exception, these standards apply to all local churches/charges, district and annual conference ministries, and those who serve within.

Minimum Reasonable Safety Standards in Recruiting, Screening and Selecting Workers

1. Recruiting Workers

- a. A written position description that includes the essential functions of the job shall be provided for positions in ministries with children, youth and vulnerable adults.
- b. Interested workers shall complete an application that includes identification, address, employment history for the past five years, volunteer work during the past five years, experiences and skills specifically related to the position, prior church membership (if any), personal references (not related to the applicant) with complete address and contact information, waiver of any right to confidentiality and of any right to pursue damages against the church/charge caused by the references' responses, certification that the information provided is true and correct, voluntary disclosure of past criminal convictions, and authorization to conduct a criminal background check.

2. Screening Workers

- a. References provided by the applicant shall be checked by the pastor or a designated Safe Sanctuaries committee/team member. The reference check shall include questions about the applicant's ability to work with children, youth or vulnerable adults (depending on ministry) and leadership ability.
- b. A personal interview shall be conducted.
- c. A criminal background check shall be authorized by and completed for all clergy, paid workers, and volunteers who have regular and direct contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. The criminal background check shall be performed after every seven (7) years of service and at the beginning of service and after a break in service of one or more years. Background check results shall be kept in a secure manner.

3. Adult volunteers shall demonstrate an active relationship with the local church/charge for at least six (6) months before being allowed to be in a supervisory role in activities for children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

4. Selecting Workers

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45

- a. Only workers that have successfully completed the application and screening process shall be eligible to be considered for selection to a ministry position with children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults.
- b. In the event that the criminal background check reveals a conviction or other cause for concern, the pastor and/or another ministry leader shall consult with the applicant.
- c. Adults convicted of child abuse or named as the perpetrator in a founded or indicated child abuse report through a designated state or county agency, or who are under investigation for, or who have charges pending for child abuse, shall not be accepted as paid employees or volunteers to have direct access to children, youth, or vulnerable adults in any church-sponsored activity or setting.

Procedures for Conducting Ministry Programs and Events for Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults

- 1. Adult staff and volunteers and clergy shall observe the “Two-Adult Rule” at all times so that no adult is ever alone with children or youth or vulnerable adults at a church/charge, district or conference-sponsored event or activity. The two-adult rule requires that regardless of the size of the group, there shall always be two unrelated adults present. This may include the presence of an adult “roamer” who moves in and out of rooms/ministry activities. No child, youth, or vulnerable adult shall be left unsupervised while attending a ministry program or event.
- 2. Adult staff and volunteers are those who are at least 18 years old and who are at least five years older than the oldest minor present, whom they are leading, ministering to or supervising. Youth (those ages 13-17) are invited to assist adult volunteers but are not to be considered an adult for the “two-adult rule”.
- 3. All adult staff and volunteers and clergy shall be observant for unusual behaviors and signs of child, youth, and vulnerable adult abuse and shall report them immediately to the appropriate supervisor.
- 4. All adult staff and volunteers and clergy working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults shall receive a copy of the applicable local church/charge, district or conference ministry or program Safe Sanctuaries Policy before starting their service and shall agree to covenant with the (local) United Methodist Church, District or Conference ministry or program to fully cooperate with these abuse prevention strategies.
- 5. All ministry activities shall occur in open view. Each room or space where ministry events occur must be open to public view. This may require enclosed spaces such as classrooms, having a viewing window, a glass panel in the door, a half door configuration or an open door.

- 1 6. Written attendance records shall be kept for all ministry events/activities involving
2 children and youth. These records shall include at a minimum, the date and names of all
3 participants and shall be kept until Jesus returns (perpetuity).
4
- 5 7. Ministry activities involving transportation shall require a written permission slip/form and
6 signed by a parent/guardian. Drivers of children, youth and vulnerable adults must be 21
7 years of age. The ministry supervisor shall be required to keep a copy of their current
8 license and proof of insurance card on file with the appropriate ministry program (i.e.,
9 church/charge, district, conference ministry).
- 10
- 11 8. Facilities shall be free from conditions that pose a safety or health hazard to the
12 participants.
13
- 14 9. Appointed clergy shall regularly review and be familiar with public sex offenders registries
15 maintained by New York State law enforcement agencies. This is done by accessing:
16 http://criminaljustice.state.ny.us/SomsSUBDirectory/search_index.jsp
17
18

19 EDUCATION

20
21 The Upper New York Annual Conference shall make available a standardized training program
22 to assist each charge, district, agency, and ministry to fulfill the covenant to “educate all of
23 our workers with children, youth, and vulnerable adults regarding the use of appropriate
24 policies and methods”.
25

26 REPORTING AND RESPONSE

27 Reporting

28 Reporting shall be required by any staff or volunteer that personally witnesses an incident of
29 abuse or exploitation, when an allegation of an event of abuse or exploitation is made to staff
30 or a volunteer by a third party and/or when a child, youth, or vulnerable adult discloses
31 abuse or exploitation to a staff member or volunteer. It is crucial that reporting be
32 immediate and the allegations dealt with as soon in time as possible to the incident or
33 disclosure.
34

- 35 1. The staff person or volunteer who observes alleged abuse or to whom such abuse is
36 reported or disclosed, or who suspects abuse shall be required to report the
37 incident/suspected abuse **immediately** to the person in charge of the ministry/activity.
38 Upon receiving the information, the person in charge of the ministry/activity shall
39 **immediately** call the New York State Child Protective Services Hotline at (800) 342-3720.
40 Identification information for the alleged victim and the adult responsible for their care is
41 required for the report. The pastor in charge and immediate staff supervisor are to be
42 informed immediately before or subsequent to the making of a report. The person in
43 charge of the ministry/activity in which the alleged abuse was observed or disclosed shall
44 immediately attempt to obtain necessary information such as the name of the alleged
45 victim and his/her address and family information.
46

- 1 2. If the accused is the appointed clergy, supply pastor or a member of his/her family, the
2 allegations shall be immediately reported to the District Superintendent. The District
3 Superintendent shall immediately report to the proper authorities as set forth in paragraph
4 1 above. The District Superintendent shall take responsibility and act according to the
5 established rules in The Book of Discipline with respect to claims against the pastor. If the
6 District Superintendent is not available, the incident shall be reported to the Bishop's
7 office.
8
- 9 3. All clergy are included in mandatory reporting as required by The Book of Discipline¹.
10
- 11 4. After the person in charge of the ministry/activity has reported the suspected abuse to the
12 proper authorities, the appointed clergy/supply pastors shall report the incident
13 immediately to the District Superintendent. If the District Superintendent is not available,
14 the incident shall be reported to the Bishop's office.
15
- 16 5. The person in charge of the ministry/event must keep a written report of the steps taken
17 by the church/charge in response to the reported abuse. The report should be kept brief
18 and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. This report should be kept
19 in a secure place. It should be written or typed to prevent it from being changed.
20
- 21 6. **NEVER** discuss allegations with any other people except law enforcement or designated
22 county investigators. To do so can cause irreparable harm to the victim, their family, the
23 church/conference and community.
24
25

26 Response Plan

27 A quick, compassionate and unified response to an alleged incident of abuse is expected. All
28 allegations shall be taken seriously. In all cases of reported or observed abuse there shall be
29 cooperation with all official investigating agencies.

- 30 1. All media requests for statements shall be directed to the Annual Conference Director of
31 Communications.
32
- 33 2. Take all allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim's family. Show
34 care and support to help prevent further hurt. Extend whatever pastoral resources are
35 needed. Remember that the care and safety of the victim is the **first** priority. Respond in
36 a positive and supportive manner to the victim and the victim's family.
37
- 38 3. Immediately, and with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the accused, remove the
39 accused from further involvement with children, youth, or vulnerable adults and advise the
40 accused that there has been an allegation of abuse. Details of the allegations of the abuse

¹ The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, ¶341.5, All clergy of The United Methodist Church are charged to maintain all confidences inviolate, including confessional confidences, except in cases of suspected child abuse or neglect or in cases where mandatory reporting is required by civil law.

1 should not be discussed with the accused at the time of the removal. In any removal of a
2 staff member or volunteer from any activity/ministry, care shall be taken to handle the
3 removal in a discreet manner, recognizing that there will be an investigation by either
4 state or church authorities, or both.
5

6 4. When it has been alleged that a member of the church staff or volunteer, has committed
7 an act of abuse or exploitation, the staff member or volunteer shall be required to refrain
8 from all ministry/activities with children, youth, and vulnerable adults until the incident
9 has been fully resolved by the appropriate state authorities and/or in accordance with The
10 Book of Discipline.
11

12 5. Notify the parents/guardians or the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure
13 the safety and well being of the child, youth, or vulnerable adult until the
14 parent(s)/guardian(s) arrive. **NOTE:** If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser,
15 follow the advice of the authorities concerning notifications of others.
16

17
18 6. The church/charge shall provide a supportive atmosphere to all those who are affected,
19 offering both objectivity and empathy as it seeks to create a climate in which healing may
20 take place.
21