



## **SAFE ENVIRONMENT POLICY**

### **Policies and Procedures for Safe Ministry with Children and Youth**

#### **Policies for Screening Volunteers:**

- Volunteers must sign a Background Check Release Form, and complete a Volunteer Application *before* working with children and or youth. A national and criminal background check must be completed and references checked on each individual.
- An individual must be involved with Oak Grove at least 6 months before you are allowed in any position involving minors.
- An Individual must be an active member of this Church to be a lead teacher with children and youth in any ongoing Christian Education class.
- Each volunteer working with children or youth will be required to attend *Darkness to Light's Stewards of Children Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Training*. Training must be repeated every three years and will be offered quarterly.
- Oak Grove UMC's Safe Environment Policy for preventing child abuse shall be distributed to all volunteers and staff working with children and youth.

#### **Safe Environment Procedures:**

- All children and youth classrooms should have doors installed with a clear windowpane, or a half door, providing clear visibility into the rooms. Doors with no window shall remain open.
- Abide by "Two Adult Rule"; two adults must be present anytime children or youth participate in a church program or church sponsored activity, whether on church grounds or away.
- Sign-In, Sign-Out procedures are adhered to by Nursery staff, and volunteers. A check-In system is in place for Sunday mornings, providing nametags for each child. A parent must sign children in and present second nametag to teacher upon pick-up. Weekday nurseries use sign-in sheet including parent contact information.
- Children enrolled in the Christian School, Young Children's School or After School Club are to be signed in and out of classrooms by a parent or authorized adult as required by the each of these programs.
- No minor is ever allowed to be alone with only one adult on church premises or in any church-sponsored activity unless in a counseling situation.
- Adults should not go in a bathroom with a minor except in cases where assistance with potty training is needed. Bathroom doors in between classrooms shall be left open if this assistance is needed. When using larger multi-stall bathrooms, children should be sent in pairs or groups to the bathroom. An adult should be within earshot or stand in doorway if possible.
- Paid employees must maintain valid certification for CPR and First Aid. Oak Grove UMC will offer CPR and First Aid classes for volunteers who wish to be trained twice a year.
- Oak Grove UMC shall provide adequate liability insurance that includes sexual abuse coverage.

## For Suspicion of Child Abuse or Neglect

### Who Should Report?

- Those with reasonable cause to believe that a child has been abused or neglected.
- **Mandated Reporters include all paid staff *and* volunteers working with children and youth.**
- **“An oral report shall be made immediately, but in no case later than 24 hours from the time there is reasonable cause to believe a child has been abused.”**
- “Any person making a report, whether required by this Code section or not, shall be immune from liability as provided in this subsection.”
- Any person or official required by subsection (c) of this Code section to report a suspected case of child abuse who knowingly and willfully fails to do so shall be guilty of a misdemeanor.”
- O.C.G.A. 19-7-5

### How Do You Report?

- Think clearly and objectively about making a report.
- Try to keep emotion out of it and give factual information about what you have observed or heard – doing this will help you clarify in your mind why you are reporting and that your goal is to help the child be safe as well as to be safe yourself.
- Do not tell anyone about the report or show it to anyone other than a supervisor when required.

Call report to County DFCS office at **404-370-5251** during regular business hours 8:30am – 5pm.

Call report to On-Call Center at **1-855-GA-CHILD** from 5:00pm – 8:30am Monday-Friday, weekends and Holidays.

The General Conference of The United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child sexual abuse in the church. The adopted resolution includes the following statement:

Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes [a] child. . .welcomes me." (Matthew 18:5). Children are our present and our future, our hope, our inspiration. They are full participants in the life of the church and in the realm of God.

Jesus also said, "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of 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). Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to the little ones, the children. The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church state that "...children must be protected from economic, physical and sexual exploration, and abuse."

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, exploitation and ritual abuse (ritual abuse refers to abusive acts committed as part of ceremonies or rites; ritual abusers are often related to cults, or pretend to be) occur in churches, both large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural and racial lines. It is real, and it appears to be increasing. Most annual conferences can cite specific incidents of child sexual abuse and exploitation in the churches. Virtually every congregation has among its members adult survivors of early sexual trauma.

Such incidents are devastating to all who are involved: the child, the family, the local church and its leaders. Increasingly, churches are torn apart by the legal, emotional, and monetary consequences of litigation following allegations of abuse. God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from sexual and ritual abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults grow safe and strong. (From The Book of Resolutions of *The United Methodist Church-1996*. Copyright 1996 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission. [pp. 384-386])

Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we adopt this policy for the prevention of child abuse in our church.

### **Statement of Covenant**

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 of our children and youth as well as all of the workers with children and youth. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; we will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events; we will educate all of our workers with children and youth regarding the use of all appropriate policies and methods (including first aid and methods of 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. Responding to allegations of abuse requires sensitivity and seriousness. Situations must be handled forthrightly with due respect for people's privacy and confidentiality.

***In covenant with all other United Methodist congregations, we adopt this policy for the prevention of child abuse at Oak Grove United Methodist Church.***