

Adopted 1/07

**BEAR CREEK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
YOUTH AND CHILDREN SAFE CHURCH POLICY**

A. INTRODUCTION

Scripture and our United Methodist tradition inform us in our belief that all of human life is of sacred worth, perhaps children most of all. Hear the words of Jesus in Matthew 18:5-6: “Whoever welcomes [a] child, welcomes me. 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.”

With The Book of Discipline we affirm that our youth and our children are full human beings in their own right but, because they are particularly vulnerable, they are our sacred trust to whom we have special responsibility (Paragraph 162.III.C.). The Church is particularly accountable to provide a safe environment for youth/children (Paragraph 161.II.H.). “Children must be protected from economic, physical, emotional, and sexual exploitation and abuse” of any kind (Paragraph 162.III.C.).

Therefore, as a covenanted Christian community of faith, it is the purpose of Bear Creek United Methodist Church to conduct all youth/children related events in ways that promote the safety and spiritual growth of all of our youth/children, as well as all of the workers with youth/children who also participate in these events.

B. SCOPE

This policy and its provisions shall apply to all paid and unpaid staff, whether lay or clergy who have any contact with youth/children who participate in any church activities or events. For the purposes of this document, children are infant through sixth grade, junior high are grades seventh through ninth, and senior high are grades ninth through twelfth. Adults are eighteen years of age and older or who have completed their senior year of high school. During the summer the grade level of the child is defined as the grade that they will be entering in the fall.

C. PURPOSE

Our congregation’s purpose for establishing this Youth/Children’s Safe-Church Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all of our children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

D. A HIGHER STANDARD

As ambassadors of Jesus Christ, we must strive to be worthy of a very high standard of trust. For this reason, every worker at Bear Creek UMC must avoid even the appearance of inappropriate behavior. All workers both paid and volunteer must diligently avoid any contact that appears wrong to a reasonable observer, even if no misconduct takes place.

E. STATEMENT OF COVENANT

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to the best of our ability to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all of our youth/children, as well as the workers with them. We will follow the 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, youth, and vulnerable adults 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.

F. PROCEDURE FOR UPDATING AND REVISING THE YOUTH AND CHILDREN SAFE-CHURCH POLICY

1. Updating/Revising

The Administrative/Church Council of Bear Creek UMC shall have the authority to revise and update these policies on a bi-annual basis or at the request of leadership or Policy Coordinator.

2. Waiver of Policies

Church policies may be waived occasionally for exceptional circumstances. The goal of Bear Creek UMC is to promote safety while maintaining practical flexibility in children and youth ministry. Waiving policies will only be authorized by the Policy Supervisor and/or in consultation with the program staff person in charge.

3. Modification of Policies

This policy may be modified or withdrawn by Bear Creek UMC's Church Council at any time. These policies are not intended to create an implied or express contract with any person. They are not intended to create a legally enforceable or binding promise or representation.

I. YOUTH AND CHILDREN ACTIVITY GUIDELINES

A. GENERAL SAFETY REQUIREMENTS

1. Parents shall be given advance notice and full information regarding any church-related activities or meetings for their youth/children.
2. All local churches must be insured for abuse, risk, and facility hazards.
3. Any activity that has a risk factor to it requires the presence of an experienced and/or certified guide or instructor. For example, swimming, river rafting, rock

climbing, challenge course, or other risk-related activities. Participation in these activities shall also be properly insured with a certificate of liability. If the activity is contracted to an outside party, then the contractor shall also be properly insured with a certificate of liability insurance providing a minimum of one million dollars liability coverage limits.

4. If any special equipment is used that requires special instruction, the instructions for its use will be posted and followed. Participants will also be instructed verbally in the use of the equipment.
5. Medical permission forms are required from all youth/children (and possibly adults) participating in church events. These forms shall accompany the adult coordinator of the event or meeting and shall include a waiver of liability. In the case of an accident that requires medical attention, the person who is responsible for the event or the meeting will use all means possible to contact the parent, guardian or emergency contact while ensuring that the youth/children receive the proper care.

The Policy Supervisor will coordinate the format of all medical information and permission forms, including periodic updates, as needed for children, youth, and adults forms.

All adult coordinators and leaders with access to completed medical information and permission forms shall be trained yearly concerning the confidentiality of the included Private Health Information (PHI) and how it may be used and disclosed, as laid out in the federal Health Information Portability and Accountability Act.

6. There shall be a first aid kit on the premises at all church events and accompanying a qualified adult on all overnight events. That first aid kit shall include disposable vinyl gloves, assorted gauze and bandages, antiseptic/alcohol wipes, adhesive tape, antibiotic ointment, cold compress, soft splints, triangle bandages, scissors and a CPR barrier.
7. Any overnight event shall have, at the least, first aid staff certified in first aid and CPR who can administer minor first aid, dispense medicine as needed, and who are capable of determining whether additional medical attention is necessary. This person is also responsible for reporting all incidences to the Policy Supervisor/DSO or pastor.
8. For all overnight events that include children sixth grade and younger without their parents present, medications dispensed and treatments administered will also be kept. If parents are present on site, they may be entrusted with the medications for their own children, provided safe storage is arranged for all medications.

9. For all overnight events that include youth and/or young adults, seventh grade and older, all participants with medications will submit a list of medications, dosages and times to be taken to the first aid staff/DSO prior to the event. If safe storage is available, the participants may be allowed to self-administer medications. This will be at the discretion of the first aid staff/DSO.
10. All participants in an event will consistently remain in groups of three or more. All minors will have an adult leader present.
11. If anyone notices unrecognized people at an event, the event or meeting coordinator shall be informed as soon as possible.

B. DRIVING REGULATIONS

1. Only those who are 18 or older may drive on event business or during an event. If there are passengers involved, the driver shall be at least 21 and at least four years older than the oldest youth participant.
2. The driver is responsible for possessing a valid driver's license and appropriate insurance. The driver's record shall conform to any standards that are required by the church's insurance company.
3. If an adult other than a parent or guardian provides rides to or from a church event or meeting for youth/children, the parent or guardian must provide written permission to the chaperone that is driving.
4. Youth are discouraged from driving themselves to special events. If, due to extenuating circumstances, a youth needs to drive to an event, keys for the automobile will be held by the event leader during the event.
5. If a youth drives to a special event or meeting, the youth who is driving shall carry written permission to drive to the event from his/her parents.
6. There shall be no "in and out" privileges for youth/children. The event leader shall approve exceptions to this rule in advance.
7. Vehicles that are used for and during events shall meet all legal requirements.

C. OVERNIGHT EVENTS

1. Boys and girls may not sleep in the same room unless there is no other option as a result of shortages of chaperones or because of the nature of the space. If they are in the same room and there is a divider available, it shall be used to separate the genders. If there is no divider available, boys and girls shall be at least six feet apart from each other.

2. There shall be at least one adult of the same gender in the sleeping quarters.
3. At overnight events lasting 30 hours or longer, a minimum of eight consecutive hours of sleep shall be scheduled per night. These hours begin with lights out and quiet time and end at least one half hour prior to breakfast.

D. POLICY SUPERVISOR

1. The Bear Creek UMC shall have a designated Policy Supervisor whose job it is to oversee that State Patrol background clearances are made for all volunteers. Staff Parish Relations Committee is responsible for checking references and backgrounds for all paid staff. This person will keep the background checks in a safe, locked space. They are also assigned the responsibility of developing, overseeing and reviewing the training of all staff and volunteers. This training may include the following subject areas:
 - Appropriate boundary guidelines
 - Types of abuse, the relationship between imbalances of power and abuse
 - Causes and indicators of abuse
 - Reporting procedures
 - What to do when you suspect or discover child abuse
 - Understanding the victim and the abuser
 - Working with abuse victims
 - Conference youth/children event policies
 - Media reporting policies
2. The Policy Supervisor shall be required to be a Conference Designated Safety Officer (DSO) and trained accordingly.
3. The Policy Supervisor is also responsible for serving as the resource person on these issues, for receiving reports of guideline misuse or reports of abuse, and for seeing that all persons who need to know of abuses are informed.
4. The Policy Supervisor is responsible for carefully documenting all aspects of an abuse incident on the Abuse Incident Report Form. This report shall be forwarded immediately to the pastor, District Superintendent, and Conference Office, and to any other group who made need to know.
5. If a person reports that they have been abused in another setting, the Policy Supervisor shall consult with the event leaders or other oversight staff and they shall make a determination of who should be informed; which may include CPS, law enforcement, etc. In the case of a minor, if the parents are not the subjects of the abuse, they need to be informed as well.

E. POLICY FOR SCREENING PAID AND VOLUNTEER STAFF

1. All adults shall pre-register for an event. The registration shall include the standard screening questions for the Washington State Patrol Criminal History Check.
2. An adult who works in a role that places them in direct contact with youth/children shall complete a Washington State Patrol Criminal History Check.
3. Those who are not residents of Washington or who have resided in Washington less than three years shall provide three reference checks from a prior church, school or employer who are not related to the applicant. Copies of these documents shall be filed with the Policy Supervisor.
4. Prior to the beginning of each new year, the Policy Supervisor shall ensure that checks are completed for every adult who is involved in the program or will be involved. As others join, they will need to fill out background checks.
5. A criminal conviction for a sexual offense disqualifies an applicant from working with youth/children. Other automatic disqualifiers usually are convictions for incest, rape, assaults involving minors, murder, kidnapping, child pornography, domestic violence to the other parent and physical abuse. Anyone who was abused as a child who wants to work with youth/children should have a discussion with the pastor about their ability to work with kids and know what the boundaries are.

II. CODE OF BEHAVIOR

A. RULES OF GENERAL SUPERVISION FOR ADULTS WORKING WITH YOUTH/CHILDREN

1. The behavior of adults working with youth/children must reflect the highest standards of Christian maturity, foster trust at all times, and be above reproach. Adults engaged in church-related events or activities with youth/children present should never engage in sexually suggestive behavior or inappropriate touching.
2. Any sexual or sexually suggestive behavior by an adult toward any fellow worker or event participant at a church event where an imbalance of power exists between the acting adult and the other person constitutes an abuse of power. Consent is not a defense to an abuse of power.

Sexual harassment is any unwanted sexual advance, physical or verbal demand, or sexually suggestive behavior, which is perceived as demeaning,

intimidating or coercive. Prohibited behavior includes unsolicited and unwelcome contact that has sexual or coercive overtones, including:

- a. Sexually suggestive or coercive communication of any kind such as obscene letters, notes or invitations, comments, threats, slurs, epithets, jokes about gender-specific traits or sexual orientation, sexual propositions;
 - b. Any bullying or intimidation act whether it is physical contact, such as intentional touching, pinching, brushing against another's body, impeding or blocking movement, assault, coercing sexual intercourse; visual contact, such as leering or staring at another's body, sexually suggestive gesturing, displaying sexually suggestive objects or pictures, cartoons, posters, or magazines; or verbal threats, name-calling, or any unwanted gesture.
3. The following guidelines for touching are to be carefully followed by anyone working with youth/children:
- a. Touching should always be initiated by the youth/child. The adult should respond to the child's need for comfort and encouragement and not base touching on their own emotional needs. Appropriate touching by an adult involves holding hands as part of a group activity; touching only the head or shoulders, and/or a side-on hug of the shoulders.
 - b. Touching between an adult and a youth/child shall only occur in the presence of other adults.
 - c. A youth's or child's preference not to be touched should be respected by adults and others. This includes youth to youth and child to child.
4. Anytime an adult thinks that their own or another adult's behavior towards a youth/child, either touching or verbal, may have been perceived as inappropriate, that adult shall report the behavior to the leader in charge or the Policy Supervisor.
5. All adults shall avoid being alone, one-on-one, with youth/children unless parental permission has been given in writing previously. Interaction with youth/children shall be conducted within the sight/supervision of at least one other adult. In cases where it is impossible to avoid direct, one-on-one interactions, the following guidelines shall be observed:
- a. If an adult or leader is alone with youth/children, two or more youth/children shall be present with the adult or leader.

- b. If interactions are being conducted in a classroom and there is only one adult available, there shall be a roamer on premises and the classroom door shall remain open.
 - c. When private consultation is needed between a youth/child and an adult, another adult shall be informed of the activity and of the location in which the activity is taking place. The monitoring adult shall strive to ensure that the consultation takes place in a public space within sight of others but not necessarily within hearing range.
6. Adults shall respect the privacy of youth/children when changing clothing or showering to the extent safety allows. Adults will not be nude in front of children/youth.
 7. Youth/children shall be supervised at all times by at least one adult who is at least four years older than the oldest youth/child who is attending the event as a participant.
 8. When only two adults are required for supervision, it is recommended that the second adult shall not be related, i.e., a spouse, parent, sibling, or child to the first adult. Some circumstances may require parental written permission.
 9. For overnight events there shall be one adult for every six youth/children with junior high events and one adult for every eight youth/children with senior high events. Ratios for ninth graders will be the ratios of the dominant age group at the event.

For other events the following ratios shall be:

- 1:4 Nursery: 0-6 months
- 1:6 Toddlers: 7 months-2 years
- 1:8 Preschool 3-4 years
- 1:10 K Grade through 6th grade
- 1:10 Junior High
- 1:12 Senior High

10. At least 50% of supervising personnel at an event where junior high and younger participants are present shall be at least 21 or older.
12. Anyone not registered for an event or activity is required to check in and out with the event director.
13. There will be absolutely no drinking of alcohol or use of illegal drugs at or during any church-related activities or events. Any drinking of alcohol or use of illicit or illegal drugs will lead to immediate suspension and removal from the event.

14. Possession of firearms is forbidden.
15. All adults working with youth/children shall abide by all laws and regulations applicable to the location of the event.

B. YOUTH/CHILD BEHAVIOR

Prior to any overnight or longer activity or event, youth/children shall be required to sign and abide by a covenant defining appropriate behavior.

III. RESPONSES TO CODE INFRACTIONS AT AN ACTIVITY OR EVENT

A. RESPONDING TO BEHAVIORS THAT HINDER OUR MISSION

In addition to the behaviors that are described above, there are other behaviors that may hinder the mission and purpose of our church or church group. Examples of these incidents include a chaperone that continually undermines program objectives or an event planner that neglects staff training or health and safety concerns, etc. When serious concerns arise:

1. The event coordinator or leader shall encourage the person raising the concern to talk directly with the person whose behavior is considered detrimental.
2. If the person raising the concern is unwilling or unable to talk directly on their own with the person in question or if the initial conversation is unproductive, then the event coordinator or leader shall meet with the two individuals to seek resolution.
3. If a mutually agreed-upon resolution is not possible, then the event coordinator/leader shall have the authority to prescribe a resolution.
4. Anonymous complaints or evaluations shall be considered unverifiable, and, therefore, will have no foundation for being officially addressed.
5. Persons whose behavior hinders the mission and goals of the ministry or whose negative behavior is repetitive may face review of their participation in leadership for that behavior by the person or group to whom they are accountable.
6. If the person who is perceived to be hindering the mission is the event coordinator/leader then the person who is raising the concern may report to the Policy Supervisor, pastor, Staff Parish Relations Committee, or person assigned to oversee this leader.

7. The church has the obligation to inform the Annual Conference of all persons whose behavior they deem to be inappropriate for working with youth and children. The Conference shall maintain a list of these people in conjunction with the State Patrol forms. The purpose of this list is to screen those who are requesting to work with youth/children. The church or Conference is not under obligation to report the reason for placement on the list with anyone other than the accused.

B. RESPONDING TO INCIDENTS INVOLVING PHYSICAL ACCIDENTS

1. The person who witnesses the accident shall share this information with the DSO/first aid staff or leader at the event or activity. The DSO/first aid staff or event leader shall in turn fill out the Accident Report Form, report the incident to the key leaders of the event, and notify the parents of the incident if this is deemed necessary by the first aid staff or leader.
2. The first aid staff and/or the event coordinator/leader are responsible for carefully documenting all aspects of the incident using the Accident Report Form. This report shall be recorded in the log and forwarded immediately to the Policy Supervisor of the church or staff person assigned to oversee this group.
3. The first aid staff and/or the event coordinator/leader are responsible for carefully documenting all aspects of the incident.
4. The event coordinator/leader shall make contacts as needed with the Conference insurance company, the chancellor and the pastor of the church. This coordinator shall also determine whether there is need for an investigation or additional follow-up.

C. RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE

1. All reports of abuse shall be treated with utmost seriousness and confidentiality.
2. The highest priority shall be placed on securing the safety of the victim. In no case shall the accused be confronted until the safety of the victim is secured.
3. The person who receives the report of abuse shall immediately share this information with one or more of the following: the event coordinator/leader and pastor, unless the person suspected of abuse is the event leader or pastor, then the report should be made to the Policy Supervisor, pastor, or the authorities. The event coordinator/leader or Policy Supervisor is responsible for filling out the Abuse Incident Report Form and for reporting the incident to the key leaders of the event or pastor or authorities.

4. The Policy Supervisor is responsible for carefully documenting all aspects of the incident using the Abuse Incident Report Form. This report will be forwarded immediately to the pastor.
5. The person who first hears the allegation of abuse, in partnership with the DSO, is responsible for reporting to the Child Protective Services or to the appropriate law enforcement agency.
6. The DSO will notify the parents when and if it is clear that it is safe to do so.
7. Any volunteer or hired staff person accused of abuse shall be immediately relieved of duties related to this or any other church event involving youth or children and be isolated from further contact with participants, guests and others who may be negatively impacted by the individual's presence until the review process is completed. The individual accused of abuse may not return to these types of duties until the Policy Supervisor has completed a review. This applies whether or not the alleged act of abuse occurred during a church-related event.
8. Whether or not the alleged act occurred during a church-related event, the leader and Policy Supervisor shall jointly review the incident to determine whether any additional actions are required. They shall also report the incident to appropriate parties (i.e., civil authorities, the Conference insurance company, the chancellor, etc.). All information concerning the incident shall be held in strict confidence by all parties involved.
9. If the incident is put under investigation by appropriate civil authorities, the investigation will be monitored by the Policy Supervisor and church officials until there is an outcome. All investigating will be the responsibility of civil authorities.
10. If there is no civil investigation or once the investigation by civil authorities is completed, the Policy Supervisor and/or leaders shall jointly review the incident to determine whether any further actions are needed.
11. The Policy Supervisor is responsible for contacting the accused and informing the accused of the nature of the process. The purpose of this meeting is not to interrogate the accused but to discuss the accusation. During meetings with the accused, one other mutually agreed-upon witness shall be present (e.g., a local pastor, district superintendent, the other coordinator, etc.).

12. After conducting a thorough review, the Policy Supervisor shall report the findings to the accused. If it is determined that the person has committed an act of abuse, the final goal of this process is to establish a future covenant with the offender that regulates his or her behavior at all levels of involvement with the church. This covenant shall include both an agreed-upon record of what offending actions were committed and agreed-upon solutions about what should be done in the future.
13. If no covenant is established, the accused shall remain removed from working with youth/children in the church until mediation is complete.
14. If no covenant is established, the accused may pick one mediator and the coordinator another mediator. These two mediators will then pick a third mediator, and these three people, combined with the accused and the coordinator, will come to a decision. The mutually agreed upon mediator will serve as the facilitator for this group.
15. The covenant that governs participation in church-related youth/children events shall clearly state that failure to abide by the provisions of the covenant process shall result in permanent removal from working with youth/children in the church.
16. All documentation relating to the incident shall be confidentially filed in the Policy Supervisor's locked files.
17. A list shall be maintained in conjunction with the State Patrol forms at the church and Conference office of those who may not participate in related events involving youth/children. The purpose of this list is to screen those who are requesting to work with youth/children. The church or Conference is not under obligation to report the reason for placement on the list with anyone other than the accused.
18. The list is maintained by the Policy Supervisor in conjunction with the pastor. The list shall hold people who fail background checks and people who are currently under investigation. Volunteer lists for an event must be submitted to the Policy Supervisor one week prior to an event whenever possible.
19. If a person is under some form of removal due to violation of any of these policies/guidelines and fails to report the same to a local church when initiating a desire to work with youth/children, that person shall be permanently removed from working with youth/children at all UMC events.

20. The church's obligations to respond to allegations of abuse go beyond the State's requirements. As Christians, we must also be prepared to respond to others:

- Faithful response to the victim — take the allegations very seriously, respect victim's privacy, provide sympathetic concern, no blaming the victim, absolutely no implication that the victim was in any way responsible for causing the abuse.
- Faithful response to the Annual Conference — notify PNW Conference authorities (District Superintendent, Bishop) as soon as allegations are received; keep them aware of congregation's actions; notify insurance agent.
- Faithful response to the media — one person must be designated as spokesperson in advance and have a well-thought out, previously written out response.
- Faithful response to the accused abuser — acknowledge that the person is of sacred worth. Remove *accused* abuser from position as a worker with youth/children until allegations are fully investigated and resolved.

D. RESPONDING TO ILLEGAL BEHAVIOR

Any volunteer or hired staff person accused of felonious activity shall be immediately relieved of duties related to this or any other church-sponsored event and shall be isolated from further contact with participants, guests and others who may be negatively impacted by the individual's presence until the review process is completed. If the felonious activity was not committed during a church-related event, then the Policy Supervisor along with the pastor or leader shall have discretion as to whether immediate or remedial action is required following the same procedures as listed above (see III.C.1-19). The individual accused of felonious activity may not return to duties until the church leadership has completed a review.

IV. CRISIS COMMUNICATION

1. A Media Response Plan is on file with the Pastor, the Policy Supervisor, and the Administrative Assistant. The Designated Safety Officers have been familiarized with this Plan and informed of its location. .
2. The District Superintendent and Bishop shall be informed of all investigations or allegations of abuse.

3. The spokesperson for the church should be a person who can speak calmly and thoughtfully in the glare of publicity; the person should answer questions honestly without adding extra or unnecessary information. They should be given permission to answer questions by saying, "I or we don't know at this time." NO ONE but the spokesperson is authorized to speak on behalf of the congregation. Spokesperson must be prepared to state the church's policy for the prevention of child abuse, the church's concern for the safety of the victim and all children, and the procedures the church has followed to reduce the risk of abuse. The spokesperson will have a prepared statement or written notes and not speak extemporaneously. The spokesperson will never make any statement indicating that the church does not take the allegation seriously or in any way blame the victim.