

VIRGINIA BEACH UNITED METHODIST CHURCH SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY

This policy does not apply to Seaside School staff engaged in the care of Seaside School children/youth nor does it apply to circumstances where an employee in a supervisory position oversees an employee who is under the age of 18.

A. INTRODUCTION

The Virginia Conference Annual of The United Methodist Church, on November 21 of 2013 updated the Policy for Protection Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults to include the following statement:

Our Wesleyan heritage calls us as United Methodists to justice and advocacy for those in our communities whose voices are often not heard or overlooked. The realities of the world around us cause us to focus in particular on the children, youth, and vulnerable adults who participate in ministries of the Virginia Conference. Among those realities is the fact that during the 2012 fiscal year for the Commonwealth of Virginia, there were 52,675 children reported to local Departments of Social Services as possible victims of abuse and/or neglect. Virginia Adult Protective Services (APS) received almost 20,000 reports of adult abuse, neglect, or exploitation during that same period (data from on-line 2012 reports: <http://www.dss.virginia.gov>).

Thus, in covenant with the Virginia Annual Conference of United Methodist Church, we adopt this policy for the prevention of child and youth abuse in our church. This document will help Virginia Beach United Methodist Church (“VBUMC”) clergy, paid staff, and volunteers understand and reduce the risk of abuse and create a safe sanctuary for all of God’s children and youth while undertaking this mission.

Purpose

Our congregation's purpose for establishing this Safe Sanctuaries Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all of our children and youth. This Safe Sanctuary Policy is designed to reduce the risk of abuse in order to:

1. Provide a safe and secure environment for children, youth, members, clergy, volunteers, visitors, and paid staff.
2. Assist VBUMC in evaluating a person's suitability to supervise, oversee, and/or exert control over the activities of children and youth.
3. Satisfy the concerns of parents and staff members with a screening process for clergy, paid staff, and volunteers.
4. Provide a system to respond to alleged victims of abuse and their families, as well as the alleged perpetrator.
5. Reduce the possibility of false accusations of abuse made against volunteers, clergy, and paid staff.

Statement of Covenant

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to engage 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 this Safe Sanctuary Policy and accompanying procedures 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 procedures. We will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law.

B. DEFINITIONS and VIRGINIA STATUTES

Definitions: The following terms used herein are defined as follows:

- Child – persons up to 11 years of age or who have not yet finished 5th grade.
- Youth – persons 12 to 17 years or those who have not yet finished 12th grade.
- Adult – persons 18 years of age and older.
- Supervision – The ability for a person to be in charge of a group of children and/or youth. Giving direction, setting boundaries, disciplining appropriately, and maintaining safety.
- Staff – All Clergy and paid employees of VBUMC.
- Volunteer – Any unpaid person engaged in or involved in VBUMC activities that involve the care of child and/or youth.

Commonwealth of Virginia Statutes: Because of our commitment to care for all God’s children and protect the vulnerable, VBUMC sponsored activities fully comply with the definitions offered by the Virginia Department of Social Services governing children and youth.

Child and adult protection programs are mandated by statute. The Commonwealth of Virginia’s current child abuse reporting statute was first enacted in 1975. Section 63.2-100 has been amended and modified a number of times. The statute is comprehensive, requiring the reporting of numerous types of maltreatment. The law applies to any child under 18 years of age when a parent or any person responsible for the child’s care:

- Causes or threatens to cause non-accidental physical or mental injury;
- Has a child present during the manufacture or attempted manufacture of a controlled substance or during the sale of such substance where such activity would constitute a felony violation;
- Neglects or refuses to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, emotional nurturing, or health care;
- Abandons the child;
- Neglects or refuses to provide adequate supervision in relation to the child’s age and level of development;
- Knowingly leaves a child alone in the same dwelling with a person, not related by blood or marriage, who has been convicted of an offense against a minor for which registration is required as a violent sexual offender; or
- Commits or allows to be committed any illegal sexual act upon a child, including incest, rape, indecent exposure, prostitution, or allows a child to be used in any sexually explicit visual material.

An act of child abuse may be committed by any person responsible for the care of another individual who is less than eighteen years of age. It does not matter whether the person caring for the child under the age of 18 is a compensated or a volunteer worker. It does not matter whether the person routinely is entrusted with the care of children or whether such individual only occasionally comes in contact with children. It does not matter whether the person was entrusted with the care of a child for an hour or only a moment. It only matters that a child was abused or neglected by the person who, on the occasion in question, was responsible for the child's care.

Title 63.1 of the Code of Virginia establishes a protective services program for persons who are 60 and over and “incapacitated persons ages 18 to 59.” Adults with disabilities covered under the Code are those “persons who are 18 years or older whose vulnerability is related to impaired physical and/or mental health and/or physical disability.” The statutory basis for the program is found in sections 63.1-55.1 through 62.1-55.7 of the Code of Virginia.

C. TYPES OF ABUSE and WARNING SIGNS

Types of Abuse:

- **Child/Youth abuse:** Refers to an act committed by a parent, caregiver, or person in a position of trust (even though he/she may not care for the child on a daily basis) which is not accidental and which harms or threatens to harm a child's physical or mental health or welfare.
- **Physical Abuse:** A physical injury, threat of injury, or creation of a real and significant danger of substantial risk of death, disfigurement, or impairment of bodily functions. Such injury or threat of injury, regardless of intent, is inflicted or allowed to be inflicted by non-accidental means. Examples: asphyxiation, bone fracture, brain damage, skull fracture, subdural hematoma, burns, scalding, cuts, bruises, welts, abrasions, internal injuries, poisoning, sprains, dislocations, gunshot, stabbing wounds.
- **Physical Neglect:** The failure to provide food, clothing, shelter, or supervision for a child if the child's health or safety is endangered. Physical neglect may include multiple occurrences or a one-time critical or severe event that results in a threat to health or safety, such as a toddler left alone. Other types of neglect include abandonment, inadequate supervision, inadequate clothing, inadequate shelter, inadequate personal hygiene, inadequate food, and malnutrition.
- **Sexual Abuse:** Any act defined in the Code of Virginia that is committed or allowed to be committed, upon a child by his/her parent or other person responsible for the child's care. Examples of such abuse are sexual exploitation, sexual molestation, intercourse/sodomy, and other sexual abuse.
- **Medical Neglect:** The refusal or failure by a caregiver to obtain and/or follow through with a complete regimen of medical, mental, or dental care for a condition, which, if untreated, could result in illness or developmental delays.
- **Failure to Thrive:** A syndrome of infancy or early childhood that is characterized by growth failure, signs of severe malnutrition, and variable degrees of developmental retardation. Children are considered to be in this category only when the syndrome is diagnosed by a physician and is caused by non-organic factors.
- **Mental Abuse/Neglect:** A pattern of acts or omissions by the caregiver that results in harm to a child's psychological or emotional health or development.
- **Educational Neglect:** The failure of the child's caretaker to ensure that the child attends school or an approved alternative program of study.
- **Bizarre Discipline:** Any actions in which the caregiver uses eccentric, irrational, or grossly inappropriate procedures or devices to modify the child's behavior.
- **Abuse:** The willful infliction of physical pain, injury, mental anguish or unreasonable confinement. Abuse includes battery and other forms of physical violence including, but not limited to, hitting, kicking, burning, choking, scratching, rough handling, cutting, biting, etc. It includes sexual assault, inflicting pornography, voyeurism, exhibitionism, and other forms of forced sexual activity on an elder or an adult with disabilities. It includes any sexual activity with an adult who is unable to understand or give consent. It includes the control of an adult through the use of threats and intimidation and through the abuse of a relationship of trust.
- **Neglect:** An adult living under such circumstance that he is not able to provide for himself or is not being provided such services as are necessary to maintain his physical and mental health and that the failure to

receive such necessary services impairs or threatens to impair his well-being. This definition incorporates both those who are self-neglected, i.e., living under such circumstance that he/she is not able to provide for himself/herself, and those whose need for physical and mental health services are not being provided by another person.

- **Exploitation:** The illegal use of an incapacitated adult or his resources for another's profit or advantage. Exploitation, or financial abuse, is accomplished by the use of covert, subtle, and deceitful means. It is usually a pattern of behavior rather than a single episode. Financial exploitation includes, but is not limited to, the crimes of larceny, embezzlement, theft by false pretenses, burglary, forgery, false impersonation, and extortion.

Abuse under the definition of the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) means "any act or failure to act by an employee or other person responsible for the care of an individual that was performed or was failed to be performed knowingly, recklessly, or intentionally, and that caused or might have caused physical or psychological harm, injury, or death to an individual receiving services. Examples of abuse include but are not limited to the following:

- Rape, sexual assault, or other criminal behavior;
- Assault or battery;
- Use of language that demeans, threatens, intimidates, or humiliates the person;
- Misuse or misappropriation of the person's assets, goods, or property;
- Use of excessive force when placing a person in physical or mechanical restraint;
- Use on a person of physical or mechanical restraints that is not in compliance with federal and state laws, regulations, and policies, professionally accepted standards of practice or the person's individualized services plan;
- Use of more restrictive or intensive services or denial of services to punish the person or that is not consistent with his individualized services plan.

Warning Signs for Abuse:

Warning signs of physical abuse:

- Has unexplained burns, bites, bruises, broken bones, or black eyes
- Has fading bruises or other marks noticeable after an absence from school
- Seems frightened of the parents and protests or cries when it is time to go home
- Shrinks at the approach of adults
- Asks questions about hitting, punching, etc. ("Is it normal that my Dad hits me?")
- Reports injury by a parent or another adult caregiver

Warning Signs for Neglect:

- Begging or stealing food or money
- Lacking needed medical or dental care, immunizations, or glasses
- Consistently dirty and has severe body odor
- Lacking sufficient clothing for the weather
- Abusing alcohol or other drugs
- Stating that there is no one at home to provide care, purchase food, etc.

Warning signs of sexual abuse:

- Difficulty walking or sitting
- Suddenly refuses to change for gym or participate in physical activities
- Reports nightmares or bedwetting
- Experiences a sudden change in appetite
- Demonstrates bizarre, sophisticated, or unusual sexual knowledge or behavior
- Becomes pregnant or contracts an STI, particularly if under age 14
- Runs away
- Reports sexual abuse by a parent or another adult caregiver

Warning Signs for emotional abuse:

- Shows extremes in behavior, such as overly compliant or demanding behavior, extreme passivity, or aggression
- Is either inappropriately adult (parenting other children, for example) or inappropriately infantile (frequently rocking or head-banging, for example)
- Is delayed in physical or emotional development
- Has attempted suicide or often talks about suicide

D. VBUMC SAFE SANCTUARY CERTIFICATION

Who is required to become VBUMC Safe Sanctuary Certified: All staff and volunteers who are engaged in the care and/or supervision of minors at VBUMC related events. No staff or volunteer will be allowed to serve until the individual has met all of his/her obligations as set forth below. This policy does not apply to parents and/or guardians as it relates to the care and/or supervision of their own child(ren).

Individuals participating as speakers, short-term presenters, facilitators, or performers in activities that involve the care of children and/or youth may not be screened in accordance with the procedures set forth above. Pursuant to this Policy, individuals participating as speakers, short-term presenters, facilitators, and performers will not be left alone with any child and/or youth participating in a church-sponsored activity.

To become VBUMC safe sanctuary certified, the following five requirements must be successfully completed:

- I. **Age Requirement:** All staff and volunteers must be at least 16 years of age. Volunteers or staff under the age of 18 must work with and under the supervision of an adult volunteer or adult staff member.
- II. **Forms:**
 - Appendix A Virginia Beach United Methodist Parent Permission and Liability Waiver
 - Appendix B Virginia Beach United Methodist Code of Conduct Covenant
 - Appendix C Permission to Obtain a Background Check Form
 - Appendix D Safe Sanctuaries Participation Covenant
 - Appendix E Virginia Beach United Methodist Safe Sanctuaries Requirement Checklist

Form Requirements:

- Youth volunteers and youth staff are required to fill out Appendix A, Appendix B, and Appendix D before they can be authorized to serve with children and/or youth.
- Adult volunteers and adult staff are required to fill out Appendix B, Appendix C, and Appendix D and pass a background check before they can be authorized to serve with children and/or youth.

III. **Records Check:** Any staff member or volunteer 18 years of age or older shall undergo and pass a criminal records background check. This records check shall be completed every 3 years. No staff or volunteer will be allowed to serve if it is determined the individual has a pending charge of, has been convicted of, or has pled guilty to a charge of sexual misconduct, child abuse, molestation, neglect, or other violent misconduct, including but not limited to those offenses set forth in Section 63.1-198.1 of the Code of Virginia; or (c) if the individual refuses to participate in any part of the screening procedures set forth in this Policy.

The Code of Virginia prohibits individuals with certain barrier offenses as defined in Section 63.2- 1719 from working with children and/or youth in regulated and licensed programs. The Virginia Conference adheres to these same requirements for volunteers in any capacity that involves direct contact with or supervision of children and/or youth. Applicants and volunteers who have been identified as having committed sexual or physical abuse or having a criminal record involving violent crime to another person will not knowingly be employed for service or accepted as a volunteer with programs or activities for children and/or youth. A list of barrier offenses/crimes can be found on the internet at: <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/content/uploads/sites/96/2016/07/Barrier-Crimes.pdf>

Under the law, convictions for offenses unrelated to abuse or neglect would not disqualify an applicant for employment or service. Even if the applicant has been convicted of a barrier crime, it may not always prevent employment or service. An applicant who has one misdemeanor conviction specified in the law may serve or be hired if:

- The criminal offense did NOT involve abuse or neglect; AND
- Five years have lapsed since the conviction occurred.

IV. **Training:** Each Ministry Director is responsible for training of staff and volunteers. No individual will be allowed to serve in his/her respective position of ministry until he/she has completed the Safe Sanctuary training. This training is offered in person or in video.

V. **Agreement:** Before beginning service, each staff or volunteer shall have completed the Safe Sanctuaries Participation Covenant (Appendix D) indicating that they have read, understand, and agree to abide by the policy for the protection of children and youth as well as other requirements of VBUMC.

E. ABUSE REDUCTION REQUIREMENTS

Six-Month Rule: VBUMC will not use anyone as a leader for children or youth ministries in the church unless such person has had continuous active involvement in the church for at least 6 months, or is specifically approved, in writing, by the Church Leadership Council and/or Pastor. Continuous active involvement includes regular attendance at worship and in other events of the life of the Church.

The Five-Years-Older Rule: Staff/volunteers who serve as leaders will be at least five years older than the oldest person they are leading in children’s and youth ministries (including youth volunteers). Staff/volunteers who are

not five years of age older than the oldest participant in the ministry they are serving in will be an assistant lead and shall not be one of the two leaders as required by the Two Leader rule seen below.

Two Leader Rule: Leaders will be assigned in teams of two or more leaders for all children and/or youth activities. These two leaders will be unrelated adults ages 16 or older and at least 5 years older than the children and youth they supervise. If the group is divided into separate spaces, each subgroup will have two leaders. If there are not two leaders available for each group, then the group will be combined with another group to make possible the presence of two leaders or the activity will be cancelled on that occasion. In accordance with this Two Leader Rule, one of the two leaders must be age 18 or older.

Participant to Leader Ratios: Adequate supervision will be provided at all times for all participants during VBUMC programs and events. The following are minimum guidelines, but all ratios shall fall into compliance with the Two Leader Rule and Five-Year Older Rule. Staff who are under the age of 18 who are fulfilling both the Two Leader Rule and the Five-Years-Older-Rule can be counted as one of the staff/volunteers for the following ratios:

- Ages 0 to 16 months: 1 staff/volunteer for every 4 children.
- Ages 16 months to 24 months: 1 staff/volunteer for every 5 children.
- Ages 24 months to 36 months: 1 staff/volunteer for every 8 children.
- Ages 36 months to 5 years: 1 staff/volunteer for every 10 children.
- Ages 5 to 18: 1 staff/volunteer for every 15 children.

The following ratios shall be considered as a guide for participants with physical and intellectual disabilities:

- Participants needing constant and individual assistance or supervision – 1 leader to 1 child/youth
- Needing close, but not constant, assistance or supervision – 1 leader to 2 children/youth
- Needing occasional assistance – 1 leader to 4 children/youth
- Needing minimal assistance – 1 leader to 5 children/youth

The specific needs of individual children, youth may require a change to these Guidelines.

One on One Sensitive Meetings and Consultation: In certain circumstances, children and/or youth may request a sensitive one on one meeting or consultation with staff. In this circumstance, the conversation is to be held in one of the following appropriate areas:

- An area in plain view of others.
- An office or room with the door open and with others in the vicinity.
- An office or room containing a live security camera.

If none of these areas are available for this conversation, the conversation must wait until the requirements can be met. Following the one-on-one sensitive meeting and consultation, a record shall be made of the consultation. This record shall include, names of involved parties, the date, time, and location of where and when the consultation took place, and a brief summary of the topic of the consultation.

Overnight Events: In any overnight event supervision must always be by adults of the same sex as the participants. Sleeping areas must be divided appropriately by biological gender. Staff and volunteers are prohibited from sharing the same bed with a child or youth unless said staff or volunteer is the parent, guardian, or sibling. Participant to leader ratios as addressed previously shall be followed.

Acknowledgment of the Staff/Volunteer Responsibility to Contact Parents and/or Necessary Officials: When necessary, staff/volunteers will contact the parents or legal guardians of children/youth to discuss the participation of the individual in VBUMC events and programs. Staff and volunteers will, as necessary, seek the assistance of parents and legal guardians concerning behavioral problems. VBUMC reserves the right, in emergency situations, to contact area police or rescue personnel in order to protect the safety and well-being of all those participating in VBUMC sponsored events and programs.

Release at End of Event: Supervision will be provided following a VBUMC-sponsored event or activity until all persons are in the care and custody of a parent, a legal guardian or other individual designated in writing by the parent/guardian. No participant will be released to anyone other than the parent or legal guardian or approved chaperone unless prior written permission has been granted to by the parent or legal guardian.

Exceptions in Emergency Situation: In order to respond reasonably and responsibly to an emergency situation, including but not limited to a medical crisis involving a child/youth, VBUMC may find that adherence to the procedures set forth in this Policy is either impossible or, based upon the reasonable judgment of the staff member or volunteer, not in the best interests of an individual entrusted to the care of the VBUMC. Under such circumstances, adherence to this Policy will not be required. If deviations to this policy occur, they shall be documented and the pastor shall be informed as soon as possible.

F. REPORTING

Those who observe others' inappropriate behavior are always very troubled by what they have seen and often have questions regarding the appropriate course of action to take. These procedures set forth are designed to: (1) provide reassurance to those that have observed such behavior by setting forth the appropriate actions to be taken; (2) establish procedures that are in accordance with the statutes of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Obligation to Report: The code of Virginia Chapter 63.2-1509 outlines the statutory requirements of reporting suspected cases of child abuse and/or neglect, and sexual abuse for children under the age of eighteen years. By this code, any person 18 years of age or older associated with or employed by any public or private organization responsible for the care, custody or control of children is a mandated reporter. In addition, although not required by law to do so, anyone else who knows or reasonably suspects abuse of a child or youth should report such suspected abuse immediately. All reports of child abuse are confidential and will be investigated. The person making such a report cannot be held liable for making the report, unless it is proven that the person acted in bad faith or with malicious intent.

Certain persons who suspect that a child or youth is abused, neglected, or exploited are required to report what they suspect to the Virginia Department of Social Services. The Virginia Annual Conference expects that when United Methodist clergy and religious professionals of the Virginia Conference become aware of suspected child abuse or neglect, they will insure that a report to Child Protective Services will be made. When a Virginia United Methodist Conference clergy person or religious professional has completed a conference workshop on "Clergy and the Reporting of Suspected Abuse or Neglect" they become mandated reporters of suspected child abuse in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Clergy can make reports themselves, anonymously if desired.

Virginia statutes simply require individuals to report their own suspicions. Such suspicions can be very well founded, i.e., based upon behavior that would lead any reasonable person to suspect child abuse, even though ultimately local or state professionals determine that no child abuse has occurred. Moreover, Virginia law protects those that report suspicious behavior that is found not to be associated with or involve child abuse. An individual who reports suspected child abuse, or participates in a judicial proceeding resulting from such a report is, under Virginia law, immune from any civil or criminal liability in connection with the report or participation. The only requirement for such immunity is that the individual reporting or participating in the judicial proceeding cannot be proven to "have acted in bad faith or with malicious intent." In other words, staff and volunteers cannot be held liable for notifying officials regarding suspected abuse if the person reporting the behavior honestly suspects that an individual has been abused.

See Reporting Procedures outlined below and the reporting flow chart (Appendix F). Reports may be made by calling the local Department of Social Services or the following hotlines which are open 24 hours a day / 7 days a week:

- **Children/Youth Child Abuse Hotline 1-800-552-7096**
- **Adults Protective Services 1-888-832-3858**

State and local officials will require particular information, see Appendix G.

The reporter may choose to remain anonymous. If the reporter gives his or her name, it will remain confidential unless otherwise ordered by a court. Following notification, the matter will be transferred to the appropriate local Child or Adult Protective Service (C/APS) unit.

Inappropriate Behavior: Certain behavior, while inappropriate, does not lead a reasonable person to suspect that a child has been or is currently being abused; therefore, does not require notification of local or state officials or church officials. Nevertheless, such behavior must be addressed in a timely manner in order to protect children/youth. Any inappropriate language or conduct between staff or volunteers and a child/youth should be discussed with the appropriate staff member or volunteer who is responsible for administration and/or coordination of the activity in which the individual is participating.

Inappropriate conduct includes, but is not limited to, any action that violates: (1) Virginia law; (2) this or any other written policy of VBUMC. If either the observer or the individual to whom such behavior was reported, upon reflection, determines that the behavior is not only inappropriate, but also gives rise to a suspicion of child abuse, the procedures for reporting such behavior to church and state officials shall be followed.

Any inappropriate behavior or suspected abuse shall be brought to the attention of the staff person or volunteer in charge of the event who shall participate in all meetings with the individual involved in the misconduct. When appropriate, prompt warnings shall be issued and remedial actions shall be taken.

Reporting Procedures: All allegations of improper conduct involving children and/or youth will be taken seriously and dealt with in a timely manner, according to state law. All reporting of allegations of misconduct during a VBUMC event will be handled as confidentially as circumstances reasonably permit. If an allegation of misconduct occurs, all necessary information will be gathered in an appropriate manner. It is important that event staff adhere to all the procedures listed below. However, circumstances and seriousness of the incident may impact the order in which the procedures are followed. For a standalone reporting flowchart, see Appendix F.

- If needed, emergency medical care should be provided.
- Staff or volunteer will take the child/youth to another staff or volunteer, preferably a person in a leadership role in the event.
- Immediately notify the appropriate staff member and/or the volunteer responsible for coordinating the event in which the individual is participating.
- Immediately begin to document, in writing, the relevant facts and observations. If the volunteer in charge or staff member is unavailable, the pastor shall be contacted. All volunteers will be given the name of the staff member responsible for the activity in which they are involved.
- Mandatory reporters will report the incident as required by law.
- The staff or volunteer shall contact the pastor immediately upon determining that a reportable incident has occurred or immediately following a report to state officials. Additional contacts will be made by the pastor as appropriate.
- If the incident or behavior to be reported involves either of the persons to whom the report would ordinarily be made in accordance with this section, the individual observing the suspicious behavior shall report the incident to the normal point of contact not involved in the suspicious behavior.

- Alleged perpetrator(s) should be immediately removed from the event and removed from contact with the alleged victim(s).
- Event staff or volunteers will ensure that appropriate care is given to others who may have knowledge of or be affected by the incident.
- Following notification of the appropriate persons, the pastor or the designated authority shall notify the parents/guardians of the child/youth.
- The Coastal Virginia District and the Virginia Annual conference shall be notified of the incident in a timely manner.

Documentation: All conversations and actions shall be documented in writing.

Discussion and Publicity: Discussion concerning the reported incident or behavior will not be held except:

1. Between the individual reporting the behavior and the individual to whom the behavior was reported,
2. Appropriate supervisory authorities,
3. The parents/guardians of the involved individual unless the parents or others in the home are suspected of abusing the individual, and
4. State or local officials.

No outside media shall be contacted and no statements generated other than by the pastor.

Every effort will be made to protect the identity of the child/youth and those accused of and those reporting the suspicious behavior or incident.

Confrontation of Accused: No one shall confront the accused with the allegations unless and until advised by state or local authorities and/or the pastor. The accused shall be relieved temporarily of event duties and shall have no contact with the alleged victim(s) pending completion of investigation.

Care for the Victims: The pastor shall extend whatever care and resources are deemed necessary to comfort both the victims of the abuse and their families and the accused and his or her family.

Insurance Carrier: The allegations will be reported to the church's insurance carrier following notification of the pastor.

Media Communications: The pastor and/or his/her designee are the only persons authorized to make statements to representatives of the media. All requests for statements should be directed to the pastor.

G. Other Required Procedures

Bathroom Policy: Volunteers and staff members should not be intentionally isolated with a child in a bathroom. If a child needs personal assistance, a door must remain ajar at all times. Children 8 years of age and under shall not be permitted to use adult bathrooms when adults are present.

Other than parents and other family members, only Safe Sanctuary trained and background check approved staff and volunteers 18 years of age and older may change a child's diaper.

Communications Policy: The Communications Policy includes, but is not limited to, social media, texting, phone calls, etc. VBUMC recognizes that with today's proliferation of social media, parents have a significant burden of responsibility to monitor messages and images that their children and youth encounter. In light of family's different opinions on social media, no child, youth, or adult will be required to subscribe or follow any of the communication methods of VBUMC.

VBUMC will not engage in any inappropriate communication, i.e. nothing sexually explicit, profane, hateful, or otherwise detrimental to the purpose of Christian nurture and education. VBUMC staff/volunteers will not text, message, or call children or youth intentionally during normal school and/or sleeping hours when not in our care. If a child or youth communicates inappropriately, the issue will immediately be brought to the attention of the Pastor, appropriate director, and that individual's parents/guardians. If the communication was public, it will be documented and then deleted. If it was private, it will be retained for review by necessary parties and only then deleted. If inappropriate communication comes from a staff, volunteer, or VBUMC adult, the issue will be brought to the attention of the Pastor immediately and the Pastor shall implement the necessary procedures of the VBUMC Safe Sanctuaries Policy.

Classroom Discipline: All leaders, volunteers, and paid staff who work with children/youth will never engage in physical discipline of a minor. The following disciplinary measures will be used:

- If a child/youth is behaving inappropriately, the leader or worker will tell the child specifically what he/she is doing that is not acceptable and state what the expected behavior is ("We do not throw blocks. We use blocks for building"). If this measure is not effective, the child will be guided to another activity.
- If inappropriate behavior continues, the child/youth may be placed at a table to work alone (away from other students).
- If the child's/youth's disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, the child may be returned to his/her parent(s), or taken to the primary leader for the activity for further direction. No physical punishment/abuse, verbal/mental abuse (such as "ridicule"), emotional abuse, or sexual abuse of any kind is to be used at any time.
- If isolating the child within the classroom or removal of the child from the room becomes necessary, the situation will be discussed with the child's parents or guardian as soon as possible.
- Other measures such as "time out" which are not inconsistent with the above, may also be utilized.
- Positive reinforcement for good behavior is encouraged.

Windows in All Classrooms: Each room set aside for children and youth shall have interior visual access. This is often accomplished by a door with a window in it, a half door, and/or a window. Interior windows remove the opportunity for secrecy and isolation, conditions every abuser seeks. A half door offers protection against children wandering outside the classroom and allows for full visual access. Observations of childcare rooms and classrooms of children and youth may be conducted during any activities.

Appropriate Equipment: All equipment used by children and youth shall be routinely examined to ensure safety and age appropriateness.

Policies Applicable to Outside Organizations: Any outside organization, group(s) or individual(s) who use any of the facilities of VBUMC to provide care to a child or youth shall provide their protection policy to the VBUMC. The VBUMC Board of Trustees will review the outside organization's protection policy and determine if it is adequate.

Advance Notice to Parents: A basic rule for ministry with children and youth is to always give the parents advance notice and full information regarding the event(s) in which their children will be participating. Providing parents with advance notice and full information about activities must be a guiding principle in a church's ministries with children and youth. Advance notice also provides information on content and substance of the event and if it is suitable for their participation. Most important, advance notice demonstrates the church takes its ministries seriously enough to plan thoroughly and to provide the safest possible experiences. One of the best examples of this is prior to taking minors on trips. Information will be provided in writing to the parents regarding the trip and written parental permission, including a signed medical treatment form and emergency contacts, will be required.

H. APPROVAL AND IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICY

The VBUMC Church Leadership Council is responsible for the yearly review of the Safe Sanctuary Policy under the guidance and direction of the Board of Trustees.

Revised:

- **October 2025**

APPENDIX A

VIRGINIA BEACH UNITED METHODIST PARENT PERMISSION & LIABILITY WAIVER

PARTICIPANT'S NAME _____ AGE _____ BIRTH DATE _____

ADDRESS _____ SCHOOL _____ GRADE _____

PARENT(S)/GUARDIAN NAME(S) _____ / _____

PARENT CELL PHONE NUMBERS _____ / _____

**Please insert participant's name; read and complete Media Release Consent;
and initial / date this page.**

The undersigned do(es) hereby give permission for our(my) child: _____ ("Participant"), to attend and participate in Virginia Beach United Methodist Church children or youth ministry activities, events, and retreats. We (I), the undersigned, do hereby release, forever discharge and agree to hold harmless (Virginia Beach United Methodist Church, its directors, employees, volunteers and agents (collectively herein the "Church") from any and all liability, claims or demands for accidental personal injury, sickness or death, as well as property damage and expenses, of any nature whatsoever which may be incurred by the undersigned and the Participant while involved in the children/youth activities. We (I) the parent(s) or legal guardian(s) of this Participant hereby grant our (my) permission for the Participant to participate fully in children and youth ministry activities, including trips away from the church premises. Furthermore, we (I) [and on behalf of our (my) minor Participant(s)] hereby assume all risk of accidental personal injury, sickness, death, damage and expense as a result of participation in recreation and work activities involved therein. Further, authorization and permission is hereby given to said Church to furnish any necessary transportation (within the limitations of church insurance and the law), food and lodging for this Participant. The undersigned further hereby agree to hold harmless and indemnify said Church for any liability sustained by said Church as the result of the negligent, willful or intentional acts of said Participant, including expenses incurred attendant thereto.

MEDICAL TREATMENT PERMISSION: We (I) authorize an adult, in whose care the minor has been entrusted, to consent to any emergency x-ray examination, anesthetic, medical, surgical or dental diagnosis or treatment and hospital care, to be rendered to the minor under the general or special supervision and on the advice of any physician or dentist licensed under the provisions of the Medical Practice Act on the medical staff of a licensed hospital or emergency care facility. The undersigned shall be liable and agree(s) to pay all costs and expenses incurred in connection with such medical and dental services rendered to the aforementioned youth pursuant to this authorization.

EARLY RETURN HOME POLICY: Should it be necessary for our (my) youth to return home from a VBUMC youth ministry activity due to medical reasons, disciplinary action or otherwise, the undersigned shall assume all transportation costs and responsibility.

TRANSPORTATION PERMISSION: The undersigned does also hereby give permission for our (my) youth to ride in any vehicle driven by an approved ADULT chaperone while attending and participating in activities sponsored by Virginia Beach United Methodist Church. My youth and I understand that SEAT BELTS SHALL BE WORN AT ALL TIMES during transportation.

COMMUNICATION PERMISSION: The undersigned does hereby give permission for VBUMC staff/volunteers to have one-on-one communication with my child via phone, texting, and social media when the conditions for appropriate communications are met as written in the VBUMC Safe Sanctuaries Policy. VBUMC will not engage in any inappropriate communication, i.e. nothing sexually explicit, profane, hateful, or otherwise detrimental to the purpose of Christian nurture and education. VBUMC staff/volunteers will not text, message, or call, children or youth intentionally during normal school and/or sleeping hours when not in our care. If a child or youth communicates inappropriately, the issue will immediately be brought to the attention of the Pastor, appropriate director, and that individual's parents/guardians. If the communication was public, it will be documented and then deleted. If it was private, it will be retained for review by necessary parties and only then deleted. If inappropriate communication comes from a staff, volunteer, or VBUMC adult, the issue will be brought to the attention of the Pastor immediately and the Pastor shall implement the necessary procedures of the VBUMC Safe Sanctuaries Policy.

Yes _____ No _____ If Yes, Child/Youth Phone Number: _____

MEDIA RELEASE CONSENT: Virginia Beach United Methodist Church is authorized to use photographic and/or videotaped images of my child in future church publications. Yes ____ No ____ . Publications include the church web site, newsletters and social media pages. Youth names will not be published. In providing consent, I agree that I do not and will not require financial compensation.

Initials _____ Date _____

Parent / Guardian Information

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/St/Zip: _____

Home Phone #: _____ Cell Phone#: _____

E-mail: _____

Emergency Contacts (in case Parent / Guardian can't be reached)

Name: _____ Phone #: _____

Name: _____ Phone #: _____

Participant Information

Birth Date: _____ Date of last tetanus shot: _____

Insurance Information

Medical Insurance? Yes No Insurance Company: _____

Policy #: _____ Phone #: _____

Medications / Allergies

Please list all medications that your youth might have the occasion to use while participating in any youth function, this includes but is not limited to allergy medication, inhalers, migraine medicines, behavior modifying medications, etc. **This information will be kept confidential, but this form will be available for those leaders of the youth during emergency situations. If none, please write NONE in this space.**

What is taken	How it is taken	When it is taken	Why it is taken

While on this event, should your youth be allowed to have common pain reducing drugs such as Aspirin, Tylenol, Ibuprofen? Yes No If yes, which types? _____

Please list allergies & treatment for allergy (food, medicine, other):

Parent/Guardian/Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX B

VIRGINIA BEACH UNITED METHODIST COVENANT CODE OF CONDUCT

Rules and guidelines are put in place to help maintain a safe environment for everyone involved. The rules and guidelines set in this Code of Conduct will help minimize conflicts among the group and maximize growth and unity in our ministries.

- I will demonstrate a willingness to learn and grow in the Christian faith and reflect Jesus Christ with my thoughts, words, attitudes, and actions.
- I will respect myself and other people, obeying the instructions of the staff and leaders.
- I will encourage participation and not cause disruptions. I will model this behavior.
- I will keep my cell phone and other personal electronic devices stored away when I serve as a volunteer.
- I will respect and properly care for equipment, facilities and supplies.
- I will be an encourager, not one who ridicules, makes fun of, shares gossip, or criticizes.
- I will deal peacefully with anger and disagreements and bring conflicts to the attention of the church staff.
- I will refrain from using obscene and inappropriate language.
- I understand that public displays of affection at church can be distracting and inappropriate. I will refrain from excessive and obvious romantic behavior during church activities.
- I will respect the zero-tolerance policy for recreational drugs, vaping, alcohol, tobacco, and weapons.
- I will wear appropriate clothing.
- I will abide by the instructions of leaders and staff.

I have read and understand the rules and guidelines in this Code of Conduct Covenant and will abide by them at all times. I understand and agree that my failure to meet these expectations may result in a meeting with church staff to counsel future behavior.

Signature: _____

Parent/Guardian Signature (if under 18): _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C

PERMISSION TO OBTAIN A BACKGROUND CHECK

Staff? Y or N (Circle One) Ministry Area: _____

Permission to Obtain a Background Check

This form authorizes the church to obtain background information and must be completed by the applicant. The Church must keep a completed form on file for at least two years after requesting the background check.

I, the undersigned applicant (also known as “consumer”), authorize Virginia Beach United Methodist Church to procure background information (also known as a “consumer report and/or investigative consumer report”) about me. This report may include my driving history, including any traffic citations; a social security number verification; present and former addresses; criminal and civil history/records; and the state sex offender records.

I understand that I am entitled to a complete copy of any background information report of which I am the subject upon my request to Virginia Beach United Methodist Church, if such request is made within a reasonable time from the date it was produced. I also understand that I may receive a written summary of my rights under the Fair Credit Reporting Act.

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Identifying Information for Background Information Agency (also known as “Consumer Reporting Agency”)

Print Name: _____
First **Middle** **Last**

Other Names used (alias, maiden, nickname): _____
Address - Last 5 Years Required. Use back of form if needed.

Current: _____
Street City State Zip Dates: From & To

Former: _____
Street City State Zip Dates: From & To

Former: _____
Street City State Zip Dates: From & To

Social Security Number: _____ **Date of Birth:** _____

Best Phone Number: _____ **Gender:** _____

Driver’s License Number: _____ **State of Issuance:** _____

Best Email: _____

APPENDIX D

SAFE SANCTUARIES PARTICIPATION COVENANT

The Congregation of Virginia Beach United Methodist Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, staff, and volunteers who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the church. The following policy statements reflect our congregation's commitment to preserving this church as a holy place of safety and protection for all who would enter and as a place in which all people can experience the love of God through relationship with others.

1. No adult who has been convicted of child abuse (either sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect, emotional abuse or ritual abuse) should volunteer to work with children or youth in any church sponsored activity.
2. All adult volunteers involved with children or youth of our church must have six months of participation in our church before beginning a volunteer assignment.
3. All adult volunteers with children and youth shall observe the "Two Adult Rule" at all times so that no adult is left alone with children or youth on a routine basis.
4. Adult volunteers with children or youth shall attend regular training and educational events provided by the church to keep volunteers informed of church policies and state laws regarding child abuse.
5. Adult volunteers shall immediately report to their supervisor any behavior that seems abusive or inappropriate.

Please answer the following questions:

1. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to observe and abide by all church policies regarding working in ministries with children and youth? YES_____ NO_____
2. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to observe the "Two Adult Rule" at all times? YES_____ NO_____
3. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to abide by the "Six Month Rule" before beginning a volunteer assignment? YES_____ NO_____
4. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to participate in training and education events provided by the church related to your volunteer assignment? YES_____ NO_____
5. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to promptly report abusive or inappropriate behavior to your supervisor(s)? YES_____ NO_____
6. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to inform a minister of this church if you have ever been convicted of child abuse? YES_____ NO_____
7. I have watched the Safe Sanctuaries on-line video in full OR participated in a training session (in-person or on video conference platform). YES_____ NO_____
8. I have received a copy of the VBUMC Safe Sanctuary Policy and agree to abide by it. YES_____ NO_____

If you did the on-line training, please include the date and time that you watched to video. This is how we track to ensure that the video was watched in full: Date_____ Time_____.

I have read this SAFE SANCTUARIES PARTICIPATION COVENANT STATEMENT, and I agree to observe and abide by the policies set forth above.

Signature of Applicant

Print full name

Date



APPENDIX E

**VIRGINIA BEACH UNITED METHODIST SAFE SANCTUARIES REQUIREMENT CHECKLIST
(for ministry director only)**

Upon the Completion of Safe Sanctuaries Requirements, This Form Shall Be Placed On Top of the Safe Sanctuaries Files For the Applicant

Name of applicant _____

Requirements Check List

Applicant Meets Age Requirement _____

Applicant has Filled Out and Submitted Appropriate Forms _____

Applicant has Passed Their Background Check _____

Applicant has Completed Safe Sanctuary Training _____

Applicant has Signed *The Safe Sanctuaries Participant Covenant* (Appendix D) _____

Applicant has received a copy of the VBUMC Safe Sanctuary Policy _____

Log Of Applicant Attending and Completing Safe Sanctuaries Training.

Date of Training _____ **In Person or Online?** _____

Date When Checklist Completed _____

Appendix F: Reporting Procedure

Allegation of improper conduct involving children/and or youth

Provide medical care as required.

Take the child/youth to staff/volunteer leader and notify them of the situation.*

Alleged perpetrator will immediately be removed from the event.

Staff/volunteer leader will notify the appropriate ministry supervisor.

Observer and leader will document relevant facts and observations (See Appendix G).

Event staff and volunteers will provide care to others who have knowledge of/are impacted by the incident.

The ministry supervisor will notify the pastor/designated reporter.

The pastor/designated reporter will complete the following as necessary:

Notify the parent(s)/guardian(s).

File the report with state officials .

Notify the Conference.

Please see the Safe Sanctuary Policy for more detailed information about Reporting.

*If the incident or behavior to be reported involves the person to whom the report would ordinarily be made, the individual shall report to the next point of contact not involved in the suspicious behavior.

APPENDIX G

VIRGINIA BEACH UNITED METHODIST DOCUMENT OF REPORTING (For Reporting Abuse to the Department of Child Services)

- Name of Reporter:
- Name, address, and telephone number of the child and parents or other person(s) responsible for the child's care:
- Child's birth date or age, sex, and race:
- Names and ages of other persons who live with the child and their relationship to the child:
- Name, address, and telephone number of the suspected abuser and his/her relationship to the child:
- Details of Abuse/Neglect:
- Who last saw child/youth:
- Condition of child/youth:
- Where child is located now:
- Whereabouts of caretaker:
- Alleged Abuser/Neglector's Access to Child/Youth:
- Medical or Mental Health Treatment Needed: