



Southern Hills United Methodist Church

Oklahoma City

Safe Sanctuaries Policies and Procedures

Updated October 16, 2024

Introduction

Jesus said, “Whoever welcomes [a] child... welcomes me.” (Matthew 18:5) He 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 milestone 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 those who cannot protect themselves. In response to this call and action of the Oklahoma Annual Conference, we hereby commit ourselves as a community of faith to this policy of safety for children, youth and vulnerable adults.

Purpose

Our congregation’s purpose for establishing this Safety Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to create within our ministries a “safe sanctuary” that will foster healthy growth and development in spiritual and other dimensions as we have the opportunity to provide ministry.

Statement of Policy

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and an Oklahoma United Methodist congregation, we pledge to conduct the ministry of gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all our children, youth and vulnerable adults as well as all those who work with them. It is our policy to:

- Follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers and volunteers;
- Implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events;
- Conform our facilities to meet reasonable safety standards to reduce risk of harm or injury;
- Provide for workers adequate training regarding the implementation of our policies, procedures and preferred methodologies;
- Provide adequate supervision and support for workers as they are in ministry on our behalf;
- Educate parents and others in our congregation as to our policies and procedures;
- Have in place a clearly defined procedure for reporting instances of injury, harm or abuse that conforms to requirements of state law;
- Respond with compassion and integrity to needs as they present themselves following incidents of harm, injury or abuse;

- Regularly review our policies and procedures to assure that they conform to current legal, health, safety and denomination standards.

Conclusion

In all of our ministries with children, youth and vulnerable adults, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each person is “surround by steadfast love,... established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal”

This Safe Sanctuary Policy and Procedures have been adopted by Southern Hills UMC as of October 16, 2024.

Follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers and volunteers;

1. All workers with children, youth, or vulnerable adults will have been active with their peers in the life of this congregation for at least six months prior to their taking responsibilities in our ministries.
2. Every person working with children, youth or vulnerable adults will complete an application form and provide three non-family references to their character and relational skills. This information will be reviewed and updated every odd numbered year.

Implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events;

1. At least two adults will be present for all activities, programs, and events for children, youth and vulnerable adults. Leaders should never be alone, one-on-one, with a child, youth or vulnerable adult in an isolated or closed situation.
2. The following ratios are to be observed in all activities, programs and events:
 - a. Nursery to Preschool: 1 adult to 4 children
 - b. Pre Kindergarten and Kindergarten: 1 adult to 6 children
 - c. Elementary: 1 adult to 8 children
 - d. Youth: 1 adult to 10 children
 - e. Vulnerable Adults: 1 leader to 12
3. Young people ages 14 to 18 are welcome to serve as assistant leaders under direct adult supervision with a coordinator's permission providing that the young person is at least four years older than the group with whom he or she will work.
4. If there are not two adults per classroom, a hall monitor will check with leaders and offer assistance as needed during activities, programs and events.
5. Parents will be informed of details and will be asked to give permission for children and youth to participate in ministry activities that take place away from the church. Leaders will see that parents are informed of any changes made in plans otherwise published, even at the last minute.
6. Volunteers providing transportation for programs, activities, or events for children, youth or vulnerable adults will:
 - a. Hold a valid drivers license,
 - b. Not have more than two moving violations in the past year,
 - c. Use a vehicle in good mechanical condition,
 - d. Carry no more people than can be secured in seat belts or appropriate restraints.

7. Nursery workers will follow sanitary procedures when changing diapers and caring for toilet needs of children. Male workers will not change diapers of female children unless a female worker is present.
8. Sick children will be removed from nurseries and classes to avoid exposure of others.
9. Only adults can move or set up TVs, projectors or other heavy equipment. Any such movable equipment must be securely attached to its conveyance.
10. Children will be under supervision anytime they are in the church building and on the playground. When official childcare is not provided, parents are expected to provide supervision at all times.
11. At least two people should accompany children to the playground area to provide supervision. We are needing consideration of this one.
12. Emergency exit plans are posted in each area of the building. Also posted are instructions for tornado safety. These plans are reviewed annually with parents, leaders, teachers and caretakers.

Conform our facilities to meet reasonable safety standards to reduce risk of harm or injury;

1. Every classroom and office door will have a window providing a view of the interior.
2. Trustees will regularly check facilities for safety hazards.
3. Toxic materials, including cleaning and other supplies, will be locked in facilities well out of the reach of children, youth and vulnerable adults.
4. Electrical outlets in children's classrooms will be covered when not in use.
5. Playground areas will be checked regularly for dangers..

Provide for workers adequate training regarding the implementation of our policies, procedures and preferred methodologies;

1. Before taking responsibility for children, youth or vulnerable adults, workers will attend an orientation where policies, procedures and preferred methodologies will be reviewed.
2. Annually there will be opportunities to update and improve knowledge and skills useful in our ministries. Volunteers and paid staff are expected to take advantage of these opportunities.

Provide adequate supervision and support for workers as they are in ministry on our behalf;

1. Leaders and teachers will work in pairs whenever possible. When this is not possible, a designated person will be responsible for occasionally observing an individual at work, checking with them about needs, offering affirmation and suggestions for improvement.
 2. Leaders and teachers will know to whom they can go to for assistance whenever it is needed.
 3. Leaders and teachers will be recognized and affirmed by the congregation on an annual basis.
- Educate parents and others in our congregation as to our policies and procedures;
1. Policies and procedures pertinent to a specific area will be posted in an easily accessible location.
 2. All policies and procedures will be accessible to any church member. Copies will be kept in a notebook in the pastor's office, the church office and also available in the Resources on Planning center.
 3. From time to time throughout the year, portions of our policies and procedures will be published in our newsletter or distributed in our worship services.
 4. Each fall, at a parent's orientation, policies will be reviewed.
 5. Abbreviated copy of all policies and procedures will be provided for special events.

Have in place a clearly defined procedure for reporting instances of injury, harm or abuse that conforms to requirements of state law;

1. Any instance of injury, harm, or abuse that occurs in the context of any of our ministries with children, youth or vulnerable adults will be reported immediately to the senior pastor and the lay leader. Any such instances involving clergy will also be reported to the district superintendent.
2. Suspected abuse of any kind is to be reported immediately to the Department of Human Services hotline, 800-522-3511, as required by law.

Respond with compassion and integrity to needs as they present themselves following incidents of harm, injury or abuse;

1. When instances of injury, harm, or abuse occur, the senior pastor, lay leader or other congregational leaders as seem appropriate for the situation, will take the lead in determining the need for ministry and will coordinate its implementation.

2. The senior pastor or lay leader, working in concert with the Oklahoma Conference Director of Communications, will act as official spokesperson for our congregation with the community and the media.

Regularly review our policies and procedures to assure that they conform to current legal, health, safety and denomination standards.

1. We will annually conduct a "Safety Audit" to assess adherence to our safety policies and procedures.
2. When the need arises, we will convene a Safety Task Force to bring our policies and procedures up to date. This task force should include representation from the Board of Trustees, the Pastor/Staff Relations Committee, the Nominations and Leadership Committee. Parents of children and youth, workers with children, youth and vulnerable adults, and others with knowledge, skills, or expertise that will assist the task force in doing its job effectively.
3. Annually the Board of Trustees will assess our insurance coverage.