

# Mafair UMC Safe Sanctuaries Policy

Updated May 2021

## **Purpose:**

As we strive to provide a safe place to worship, teach, and minister to our youth and children, Mafair Church covenants to abide by the following procedures and educational guidelines.

## **Definitions:**

Adult - a person eighteen (18) years of age or older and out of high school.

Youth - a person in grades 6 through 12.

Child - a person in grade 5 or younger.

## **Procedures to Reduce the Risk of Harm:**

### 1. For gathering situations:

- a. Two (2) or more adults, who are not married or living in the same household, should be present in a gathering of one or more children or youth during any church-sponsored activity involving youth or children.
- b. If only one adult in a children's or youth ministry activity is present at any time during such function, an adult "floater" should be present and will move unannounced in and out of all rooms where only one adult is present. If a floater is involved, the doors to all the rooms involved should remain open.
- c. While it is preferable to have two adults present, it is acceptable in a public setting for one adult to meet one or more youth, e.g., at Chick-fil-A, Starbucks, etc., where other people are present, the adult and youth are visible, and isolation is avoided.
- d. Adults should not put themselves in a position to be one-on-one with children or youth.

### 2. For transport situations:

- a. It is preferable for two adults to be present in a vehicle.
- b. In the instance where this is not possible, one adult is sufficient so long as the vehicle travels with other vehicles designated for that function or where at least two or more 16 year old or older youth are present in the vehicle with the adult.
- c. This procedure does not apply to vehicles occupied by immediate family only.

### 3. Age Requirements:

- a. Volunteers and staff persons working in ministry with children and youth must be at least 5 years older than any youth or child with whom they are working.
- b. Staff working with children must be 16 years of age or older.
- c. Staff working with youth must be 18 years of age.
- d. Volunteers under the age of 18 can assist in children's ministry, but should not have primary responsibility in a given situation.

4. Background checks
  - a. Background Checks are mandatory for all Mafair staff and volunteers working with children and youth.
  - b. Background checks for volunteers will begin in 2013 and will be redone within five years of the first background check.
  - c. Refusal to allow a background check will result in the refusal of the volunteer being used in a volunteer position.
5. Visibility:
  - a. An uncovered window should be present in every door in the church facility where children or youth activities or events take place.
  - b. In the event that an uncovered window is not in the door and there is only one adult present, the door should remain open.
6. Physical Boundaries:
  - a. Corporal punishment will never be used as a means of disciplining children or youth. This also applies to the treatment of one's own children or youth while engaged in a church function.
  - b. There will be no sexual, inappropriate, or otherwise unwanted physical contact with children or youth.
7. Verbal Boundaries:
  - a. There will be no verbal or emotional abuse of children or youth.
  - b. There will be no use of sexual language in jokes.
  - c. There will be no sexual harassment.
  - d. There will be no use of inappropriate language such as swearing, or humor at the youth or child's expense.
8. Overnight children or youth trips:
  - a. Adults shall not room with children or youth in hotel settings, unless there are two adults in the room.
  - b. Adults should never sleep in the same bed with children or youth, unless it is their own child.
  - c. On sleepovers and lock-ins, attention should be given to placement of adults so that they are never sleeping alone with a group of children or youth.
  - d. Youth in relationships should never stay in the same room on overnight trips or at overnight onsite events.

#### **Procedures for Responding to Allegations of Abuse:**

**Note: You are responsible for reporting all allegations, in person or online.**

1. **Assure the child/youth's safety.**  
Take steps necessary to assure the safety of the child/youth if the situation is one of imminent harm or life-threatening.
2. **Do not confront the accused abuser with anger or hostility.**  
Treat the accused with dignity but immediately remove him/her from further involvement with children/youth.

**3. Immediately report to TN Dept. of Child Services or local law enforcement.**

When you have ***reasonable cause to suspect an incident of child or youth physical or sexual abuse, neglect, or exploitation***, Tennessee law requires all persons to make a report within 24 hours. Failure to report child abuse or neglect is a violation of the law. According to the TN Dept. of Children's Services (DCS), a child or youth's statement of abuse is sufficient cause to make a report. Do not investigate the incident yourself – the TN DCS has advised that your well-intentioned "investigation" may interfere with their investigation. Rather, immediately report to the DCS or appropriate law enforcement agency.

- a. Where the victim is under age 18, the person observing or receiving disclosure of the abuse should report immediately by calling the Tennessee DCS's Child Abuse Hotline at 877-54-ABUSE (22873). All information received by this central intake is confidential. You do not have to disclose your identity if you do not want to. The reporter is free from civil or criminal liability for reports of suspected child abuse or neglect made in good faith. Central intake will then contact the local child protective service agency to determine whether further investigation is needed. You do not need to call the local child protective service agency.
- b. Where the youth is age 18 or older, he/she should be encouraged to make a report.

**4. Then, immediately report to church staff.**

- a. For a suspected incident of child abuse, children's and youth ministry staff and volunteers should immediately report to the Pastor and SPRC Committee.
- b. Any reporting/notification by church staff should honor the confidentiality of the original reporter, providing only information necessary about the original reporter to supervising staff, unless the consent of the original reporter is obtained.

**5. Church staff will determine whether to advise the parent(s)/guardian(s).**

Church Staff in consultation with the Pastor or SPRC will determine the appropriateness of notifying parent(s)/ guardian(s) following these guidelines:

- a. Where no parent or guardian is the accused, the pastoral staff will advise the parent(s)/guardian(s). If the child/youth is present, any necessary steps should be taken to assure the child/youth's safety until parent(s)/guardian(s) arrive.
- b. Where one or more parents/guardians may be involved or accused, do not immediately advise the parents, as per the recommendations of the Tennessee Dept. of Children's Services. To do so may interfere with the pending investigation. After the investigation has begun by DCS, the parents/guardians may be contacted especially with respect to pastoral care.

6. **The Pastor or Church Administrator will promptly report to the District Superintendent or the Bishop's office** if any allegation involves church staff or volunteers or a church function or occurred on church property.
7. **The Pastor and/or Church Administrator will promptly notify an attorney** if any allegation involves church staff or volunteers or a church function or occurred on church property.
8. **The Pastor and/or Church Administrator will promptly notify the church's insurance agent** if any allegation involves church staff or volunteers or a church function or occurred on church property.

### **What is Abuse and Neglect?**

Child abuse and neglect occurs when a child is mistreated by a parent or person of authority, resulting in injury or risk of harm. Abuse can be physical, verbal, emotional or sexual.

- Physical abuse: Non-accidental trauma or physical injury of a child, or failure to protect a child from harm.
- Psychological harm: A repeated pattern of caregiver behavior or extreme incident(s) that convey to children they are worthless, flawed, unloved, unwanted, endangered. May include both abusive acts against a child and failure to act.
- Sexual abuse: When a child is involved in intentional sexual acts that produce sexual arousal and/or gratification for the perpetrator or sexual behaviors/situations in which there is a sexual component.
- Neglect: Failure to provide for a child's physical survival needs to the extent that there is harm, or risk of harm, to the child's health or safety.

(Adopted from the Tennessee Department of Children's Services website, [https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/dcs/documents/in-home-tn/prevention/Prevention\\_Resource\\_Guide.pdf](https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/dcs/documents/in-home-tn/prevention/Prevention_Resource_Guide.pdf), accessed 05/19/2021.)

### **Conclusion:**

In all of our ministries with children and youth, Mafair United Methodist Church is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child and youth will be protected, "surrounded by steadfast love, established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal."

**Mafair UMC Safe Sanctuaries Policy  
Acceptance Form**

I \_\_\_\_\_, have read,  
understand, and agree to adhere to the contents of the Mafair UMC Safe  
Sanctuaries Policy.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**