

CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION POLICY AND PROCEDURES

For Round Hill United Methodist Church

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I. Purpose

- A. To help Round Hill United Methodist Church provide a caring and secure environment for children in all phases of life.
- B. To help Round Hill United Methodist Church reduce its legal risk and liability exposure.
- C. To comply with the Virginia Conference's "All God's Children" Initiative.

II. Biblical Foundation – Round Hill United Methodist Church seeks to express God's love of children and provide for their personal wholeness. This caring community seeks to prevent child abuse of any form to our children and to be in ministry to families where abuse may occur. The Bible is foundational to our understanding upon which all policies, procedures, and ministries must stand.

And they were bringing children to Him, that, He might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, He was indignant, and said to them:

"Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the Kingdom of God. Surely, I say to you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."

And He took them in His arms and blessed them, laying His hands upon them.
Mark 10:13-16

Jesus teaches us explicitly that children have the right to the keys to the Kingdom of God. He demonstrated this through blessing and touch. Our goal in response to this Biblical mandate is to maintain a safe, secure, and loving place where children may grow. A place where care-givers, teachers, and leaders (both paid and volunteer) minister appropriately to their needs.

III. Virginia's Child Abuse Law – Under Virginia law Section 63.1-248.2, an abused child is defined as one who is less than eighteen years of age, whose parents or other persons responsible for his/her care creates or inflicts, or threatens to create or inflict, or allows to be created or inflicted upon such a child a physical or mental injury by other than accidental means, or creates a substantial risk of death or disfigurement, or impairment of bodily or mental functions. This

includes the following: Failure to provide care necessary for health, abandonment, commits or allows sexual exploitation, is endangered or neglected. Child abuse may be physical, sexual, emotional or mental, and may be the result of actions or omissions to act (e.g., lack of care for a child).

Section 63.1-248.3, Virginia Revised Code, states that, "Any person licensed to practice medicine or any of the healing arts, any hospital resident or intern, any person employed in the nursing profession, any persons employed as a social worker, any probation officer, any teacher or other person employed in a public or private school, kindergarten, or nursery school, any person providing full-time or part-time child care for pay on a regular planned basis...and any person associated with or employed by any private organization responsible for the care, custody or control of children who has reason to suspect that a child is an abused or neglected child, shall report the matter immediately...to the local department of the county or city wherein the child resides or wherein the abuse or neglect is believed to have occurred or to the Department of Social Services' toll-free child abuse and neglect hotline." (Emphasis added)

In addition, everyone should report any known or reasonably suspected child abuse immediately. Any report is confidential and the person making the report is immune from liability for making such a report, unless it is proven that such a person acted in bad faith or with malicious intent.

IV. Types of Child Abuse

A. Definition – Child 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. The following definitions and explanations in this section are from the Virginia Department of Social Services.

B. Types of Abuse

1. Physical Abuse – A physical injury, threat of injury or creation of a real and significant danger or 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, sub-dural hematoma; bumps, scalding; cuts, bruises, welts, abrasions; internal injuries, poisoning; sprains, dislocations; gunshot; stabbing wounds.

2. 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.
3. Sexual Abuse – Sexual abuse includes any act defined in the code of Virginia, which is committed, or allowed to be committed, upon a child by his/her parent or other persons responsible for the child's care. Examples of such abuse are: sexual exploitation, sexual molestation, intercourse/sodomy, and other sexual abuse.
4. Medical Neglect – Refusal or failure by a caretaker 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.
5. Failure to Thrive – A syndrome of infancy or early childhood, which 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.
6. Mental Abuse/Neglect – A pattern of acts, or omissions, by a caretaker, which results in harm to a child's psychological, emotional health or development.
7. Educational Neglect – The child's caretaker is directly responsible for the failure of the child to attend school or an approved alternative program of study.
8. Bizarre Discipline – Any actions in which the caretaker uses eccentric, irrational or grossly inappropriate procedures or devices to modify the child's behavior.

V. Reducing the Risks of Child Abuse – In an effort to create the safest possible environment within Round Hill United Methodist Church, several abuse prevention measures will be utilized. These measures include screening of paid and volunteer workers for past child abuse convictions or expungement, provision for regular training on child abuse issues to paid and volunteer staff

members, use of the two adult rule, standards for appropriate classroom discipline and open classrooms.

A. Six Month Rule – Round Hill UMC will not use anyone as a worker for children (those under 18 years of age) in the church unless they have been with us for at least six (6) months or unless they are paired with an approved worker who has been a member of the church for at least six (6) months.

B. Staff Screening

1. Before beginning the first year of service, each employed or volunteer children's teacher, child care worker, or youth worker will be asked to sign a statement indicating he/she has never been convicted of child abuse nor had such a conviction expunged.
2. Also, this screening form will ask for the following: a copy of their driver's license, general information, criminal convictions, prior church membership, and prior church volunteer work. Anyone who has had a child abuse conviction or expungement of such, as well as anyone refusing to sign the statement, will not be permitted to work with children.
3. In addition, applicants for paid staff positions will undergo a criminal record check. Round Hill UMC will cover the cost of these checks.

C. Staff Training

1. Before beginning their first year of service, all paid and volunteer child care workers, children's Sunday School teachers and youth workers and teachers will be required to read the church's abuse policy and sign a form indicating that they have read and understand the policy and agree to abide by it. Anyone failing to do so will be contacted. If the teacher or worker does not sign after being contacted, that person will not be permitted to serve until the policy has been read and the form signed. First year teachers or workers will also be required to attend one training session related to the church's abuse policy during their first year of service. These training sessions will be offered by the church, conducted by clergy and/or members of the Church Council, and held at various times throughout the year.
2. Vacation Bible School teachers and workers at Round Hill United Methodist Church will be required to read the policy and sign the acknowledgement form before the start of Vacation Bible School. Any teacher failing to do so will be contacted. Anyone refusing to

read the policy and sign the form after being contacted will not be permitted to serve. When Vacation Bible School is held at other churches, only teachers from the Round Hill congregation will be asked to comply with this policy. Leaders of community groups of children, or youth, not affiliated with Round Hill United Methodist Church are to be provided with this policy and sign this acknowledgment form. Church facilities will not be available to groups whose leaders refuse to read and sign the policy.

- D. Two Adult Rule – Whenever possible, teachers will be assigned in teams of two or more, per Sunday School hour, to every class of children. Concerted effort will be made to recruit sufficient numbers of volunteer teachers to permit team teaching. Other church sponsored or community groups of children who meet at the church must have two or more adult leaders, not of the same family, present. When the group includes both boys and girls, both male and female leaders should be present whenever possible. If the group stays overnight at the church, or a church-sponsored group leaves the premises, two or more leaders must be present and must include at least two male and two female if the group is of mixed gender.
- E. Classroom Discipline – All teachers and workers will use the following discipline measures. If a child is behaving inappropriately, the teacher or worker will tell the child specifically what he/she is doing that is not acceptable and state what the expected behavior is, i.e. "We do not throw blocks. We use the blocks for building." If this measure is not effective, the child will be guided to another activity. If inappropriate behavior continues, the child may be placed in a chair or at a table to work alone away from the other students. If the child's disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, the child may be taken to the Sunday School Superintendent and left under their supervision. No physical punishment or verbal abuses are to be used at any time. If isolating the child within the classroom becomes a common need 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.
- F. Open Classrooms – Classrooms or child care rooms may be visited without prior notice by church staff, parents, or other volunteer church workers. Brief observations of child care rooms and classrooms of children are to be conducted by the Sunday School Superintendent during Sunday School hours.

VI. Reporting Child Abuse

- A. The pastor, any church officer, any member of the Church Council, any youth leader, or any Sunday School teacher shall be familiar with these reporting guidelines and shall be open and available to members of the congregation to receive any report of child abuse. It will be made known to the congregation that these people are available and that there is a "Child Abuse Prevention Policy and Procedures" in place.
- B. Should there be allegations of child abuse at Round Hill United Methodist Church, these church leaders will agree to follow these procedures:
1. Treat any allegation of child abuse seriously.
 2. Pray for the church and for all persons affected by the allegation.
 3. Immediately begin documenting all procedures observed in the handling of the allegation.
 4. Immediately notify the District Superintendent. According to the Virginia Annual Conference Policy on Sexual Misconduct, the District Superintendent will contact the Conference Response Team. The Response Team will send a representative to Round Hill United Methodist Church within 24 hours to conduct an investigation.
 5. Immediately notify the Virginia Department of Social Services of the allegation.
 6. Immediately notify the parents if it is not known that they have previous knowledge or if they are not the accused abusers.
 7. Immediately notify the church's insurance company.
 8. Do not confront the accused with the allegation unless and until advised by the Response Team to do so. If the accused has assigned duties within the life of the church, that person must be temporarily relieved of his/her duties until the investigation is concluded.
 9. The pastor should extend whatever care and resource necessary, but under no circumstances should the pastor, or any church leader or member, investigate the allegation. In providing care to the principals (alleged victim/s and the accused) and their families, the pastor or church leader, should under no circumstances be drawn into a discussion of the validity of the allegation which could contaminate the investigation. Do not assign blame or take any steps that involve establishing or refuting the allegation.
 10. It is appropriate to show care and comfort for the alleged victim. This should be the pastoral objective from the moment the allegation is received.
 11. Observe confidentiality for both the alleged victim and the accused.

- VII. Policy Review - The Church Council and the Board of Trustees shall review the Child Abuse Prevention Policy and Procedures of Round Hill United Methodist Church annually. A verification follow-up report will be made each year at Charge Conference to insure integrity of the policy and the procedures.

Child Abuse Prevention Form

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Name:

What is your legal name: _____

What name do you go by: _____

Contacts:

What is your address: _____

How long have you lived at this address: _____

What was your previous address: _____

How long did you live at that address: _____

What is your home phone number: (_____) _____ - _____

What if any is your work number: (_____) _____ - _____

What is your Social Security Number: _____ - _____ - _____

How long have you been worshipping at Round Hill UMC: _____

Where did you worship before worshipping at Round Hill UMC: _____

With what church ministries involving children have you worked: _____

Have you ever been convicted of child abuse? Yes ___ No ___ Not Sure ___

Have you ever had a conviction expunged? Yes ___ No ___ Not Sure ___

Have you ever been charged with child abuse? Yes ___ No ___ Not Sure ___

Have you ever been accused of child abuse? Yes ___ No ___ Not Sure ___

Have you ever changed your name? Yes ___ No ___ Not Sure ___

If so, what was your prior name? _____

I have supplied a copy of my Drivers License.

Received and signed off by Church Council Chairperson _____

I was given a current Child Abuse Policy.

I have read the current Child Abuse Policy and understand its contents.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and had such answered to my satisfaction.

Further I found no material difference between the explanation given me and what is contained with the current Child Abuse Policy Document.

By signing this document I am giving Round Hill United Methodist Church the right to check, or have checked for them, the accuracy and validity of this information.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Church Officer (Who Received This Form): _____ Date: _____