



## **Hillcrest United Methodist Church CHILD PROTECTION POLICY AND PROCEDURES**

### **1. Our Mission**

Hillcrest United Methodist Church strives to provide a safe spiritual home in which each young person:

1. Comes to know Christ;
2. Experiences the joy of the Lord; and
3. Develops a strong Christian foundation

with the objective of inspiring life-long growth in the young person's walk with Christ and a strong relationship with the Church.

### **2. Biblical Foundation**

Hillcrest United Methodist Church seeks to express God's love of young persons and to provide for their personal wholeness. This faith community seeks to provide an environment which is caring and secure for all persons. 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 rebuke 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. Truly, 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 young persons have the right and 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.

*"Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled."*

Luke 14:21 (NRSV)

### **3. Purpose**

Implement reasonable procedures to reduce the risk of physical, emotional and sexual abuse of children as they participate in church ministries, and to protect staff and volunteers from false allegations of misconduct.

### **4. Definitions**

- **Paid Staff:** Person employed by Hillcrest United Methodist Church.
- **Volunteer Staff:** Persons donating their time to a children's or youth activity under the direct supervision of the program leader.
- **Children and Youth Leaders:** Non-paid persons appointed to children's or youth ministries leadership position.
- **Staff** refers to paid staff, volunteer staff, and volunteer children and youth leaders throughout this document.

### **5. Child Protection Committee**

The Charge Conference, upon nomination by the Nominations & Personnel Committee, shall annually elect a Child Protection Committee. The membership of the Child Protection Committee shall include the pastor and not less than three no more than five members of the church. The Child Protection Committee shall annually review and propose any revisions to this Policy, and shall be responsible for the administration and interpretations of this Policy.

### **6. Commonwealth of Virginia Statutes**

Under Section 63.2-100 of the Code of Virginia, an abused child is defined as one who is less than eighteen years of age,

1. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care creates or inflicts, threatens to create or inflict, or allows to be created or inflicted upon such child a physical or mental injury by other than accidental means, or creates a substantial risk of death, disfigurement, or impairment of bodily or mental functions, including but not limited to, a child who is with his parent or other person responsible for his care either (i) during the manufacture or attempted manufacture of a Schedule I or II controlled substance, or (ii) during the unlawful sale of such substance by that child's parents or other person responsible for his care, where such manufacture, or attempted manufacture or unlawful sale would constitute a felony violation of section 18.2-248;

2. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care neglects or refuses to provide care necessary for his health. However, no child who in good faith is under treatment solely by spiritual means through prayer in accordance with the tenets and practices of a recognized church or religious denomination shall for that reason alone be considered to be an abused or neglected child;
3. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care abandons such child.
4. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care commits or allows to be committed any act of sexual exploitation or any sexual act upon a child in violation of the law;
5. Who is without parental care or guardianship caused by the unreasonable absence or the mental or physical incapacity of the child's parent, guardian, legal custodian or other person standing in loco parentis; or
6. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care creates a substantial risk of physical or mental injury by knowingly leaving the child alone in the same dwelling, including an apartment as defined in section 55-79.2, with a person to whom the child is not related by blood or marriage and who the parent or other person responsible for his care knows has been convicted of an offense against a minor for which registration is required as a violent sexual offender pursuant to section 9.1-902.

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 (hereinafter referred to as a "Child" or "Children", which term as used in this Policy also includes youth ages 12-18) 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.

## **7. Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse**

In order to create the safest possible environment within Hillcrest United Methodist Church, several abuse prevention measures will be utilized.

These measures include;

- Establishment of this Child Protection Policy to ensure all those caring for youth and children agree to its provisions.
- Initial screening of staff for past child abuse convictions or expungements.
- Annual refresher training for all staff on child abuse issues.
- Use of the two adult rule.
- Appropriate standards of classroom discipline.
- Use of open classrooms.
- Annual Policy Review & Revision.
- Child Protection Policy Expectations for Outside Organization

### **A. Six Month Rule**

Hillcrest United Methodist Church will not use anyone as staff involving children or youth ministries in the church unless such person has been actively involved in the church for at least six (6) months or has a recommendation from their previous pastor by letter of transfer.

### **B. Staff Screening**

Before beginning service, staff for children or youth ministries, children or youth teacher, child care worker, or youth worker will be asked to sign a statement indicating that he/she has never been convicted of child abuse nor had such a conviction expunged. New staff will provide authorization for the authorized church representative to contact references provided by the new staff person. Anyone who has had a child abuse conviction, as well as anyone refusing to sign the statement, will not be permitted to work with children or youth.

Each paid staff shall undergo a criminal record check. The Church will cover the cost of this check. Paid staff applicants can begin to serve after successfully completing the interview and the SPRC's receiving a clear criminal records check.

Following an interview with the Pastor and the completion of the application, volunteer staff may serve as an observational helper until such time as their reference checks are completed and the six month rule along with any training requirements are completed. The Chair of the Child Protection Committee will

maintain the volunteer application records in a safe and confidential file at the church office.

### **C. Staff Training**

Before beginning their first year of service, and each August thereafter while they are serving, all staff will be required to read the church's child protection policy and sign a form indicating that they have read and that they understand the policy and agree to abide by it. Anyone failing or unwilling to do so will not be permitted to serve until the policy has been read and the form signed. Staff will be required to complete a training session offered by the church annually regarding child protection.

### **D. Two Adult Rule**

Whenever possible, there will be two (2) unrelated adults (age 18 or older) for all **Sunday morning children and youth activities at the church**. If two adults are unavailable, then either of the following options are considered to be adequate (in this priority):

- One (1) adult and one (1) senior youth at least 16 years old.
- One (1) adult and the classroom door left in a fully opened position, or door with window, such that the classroom is fully observable by an individual standing in the hallway.
- One adult with video monitoring of the classroom, activated at the detection of motion within a classroom, will be in place and utilized on an on-going basis. Recorded video created will be viewed in case of complaint by those authorized to do so by the Administrative Council.

The following guidelines for participant to supervision are recommended:

- One staff member per three children under the age of one (1) year old.
- One staff member per four children under the age of two (2) years old.
- One staff member per six children under the age of three (3) years old.
- One staff member per eight children/youth/at risk adults over the age of three (3).

For children and youth activities and meetings **conducted outside of the Sunday morning time frame**, a two adult rule shall apply with no exceptions. For any activity requiring children or youth of mixed gender to stay overnight, regardless of location, at least two (2) adults shall be present and must include at least one (1) male and one (1) female not related by marriage.

### **E. Classroom Discipline**

All staff will use the following discipline measures. If a child 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, e.g., “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 may be placed 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 Pastor or the primary leader of the activity and left under his or her supervision. No physical punishment or verbal abuse, e.g., ridicule, are 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.

### **F. Open Classrooms**

Classrooms or child care rooms may be visited without prior notice by church staff, parents, or other volunteer church workers, e.g., Sunday School Superintendent, at any time. The pastor or the primary leader may conduct brief observations of child care rooms and classrooms of children or youth during all activities. All classroom doors shall have a window suitable for viewing by people outside the classroom or be left open.

### **G. Reporting Child Abuse (*As specified in Section Six and defined in Appendix One of this document*)**

Allegations of child abuse are treated seriously. If an allegation of child abuse occurs, these procedures shall be initiated immediately:

- Pray for the church and all persons affected by the allegation.
- Notify the pastor of the substance of the allegation, unless the allegation involves the pastor, in which case the SPRC shall immediately notify the district superintendent.
- The pastor will notify SPRC chair and CCP Chair
- Immediately begin documenting the allegation, available information and actions taken, and immediately notify;
  - Fredericksburg Department of Social Services or the Virginia Department of Social Services hotline - 800 – 552-7096. If the

abuse has occurred in a locality other than the City of Fredericksburg, the Department of Social Services (DSS) in the locality where the abuse occurs should be contacted, as it will be investigated by the DSS where the abuse has occurred.

- The parent(s) or guardian(s)
- Church insurance company
- District Superintendent.

Do not confront the accused with the allegation. If the accused has assigned duties within the life of the church that person must be temporarily relieved of their duties until the allegation is resolved.

The pastor should extend whatever care and resources are necessary to those impacted by the allegation, but under **no** circumstances should the pastor or any church leader or member investigate the allegation. In providing care to the principals (alleged victim and the accused) and their families, the pastor or church leader, should under **no** circumstances be drawn into a discussion of the truth or falsity of the allegation which could contaminate the investigation. Do not assign blame or take any steps that involve establishing or refuting the allegation.

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 or otherwise made known.

Observe confidentiality for both the alleged victim and the accused until advised to the contrary by the Child Protection Committee.

- The Pastor or SPRC Chair shall designate a single spokesperson for the Church.
- If the allegations involve the pastor, the Chairperson of the Staff-Parish Committee shall be notified immediately and he or she shall immediately notify the district superintendent who shall direct the next steps taken by the church in responding to the allegations. The provisions of this Policy shall continue to apply except as the district superintendent directs that other steps be taken.

## **H. Policy Review/Revision**

The Child Protection Policy and Procedures of Hillcrest United Methodist Church shall be reviewed annually by the Child Protection Committee and then by the

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Administrative Council. A verification follow-up report will be made each year at Charge Conference to ensure the integrity of the policy and procedures.

## **I. Outside Organizations**

Leaders of community groups of children or youth who use the church facility or grounds, are required to read the policy and sign the Acknowledgement Form. Church facilities, including outdoor facilities, will not be available to groups whose leaders refuse to read and sign the acknowledgement form, unless their organization provides a copy of their protection policy to the Pastor. Upon review, the outside organization's policy may be substituted for the signed Hillcrest acknowledgment form, if that organization's policy is determined to have child protection standards equal to, or higher than the Hillcrest Child Protection policy.

## **J. Enforcement**

Any paid staff member, appointed child and youth leader or volunteer staff member who observes a violation of this policy is required to report the violation to the Pastor or the SPRC Chairperson as soon as possible.

### **Appendix One: Types of Child Abuse**

#### **A. Definition**

Child abuse refers to an act committed by a parent, care giver 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 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.

**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 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 the caretaker which result in harm to a child's psychological or 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.