

## River of Life United Methodist Church Policy

Supervision of Children and Youth  
(Updated 04/2019)

**Purpose: Child abuse prevention and Ministry Protection policies and procedures are essential for congregations, not only for the protection and safety of our children and youth, but also for our volunteers and staff working with youth.**

**The Gospel calls us to be engaged in ministry with children and youth. We should not allow the risks to undermine or stop our ministry. Rather, we must:**

- **Acknowledge the risks and develop a practical plan to address these issues:**
- **Take the steps to prevent harm to our children; and**
- **Continue to answer the Gospel's imperative to be in a ministry with children, thus making a difference in their lives.**

Since 1996, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church has mandated that each local congregation have a child/youth protection policy ("CYPP").

Coverage under the Conference Insurance Program requires that churches have a CYPP in place. All employees of a local church are required to review and acknowledge their church's CYPP on an annual basis.

Accordingly, **River of Life** United Methodist Church adopts the following policies for the protection and safety of the children and youth participating in the life of the church.

*The policies set forth below apply to all persons who provide supervision over or have care and custody of children/youth or who come into contact with children/youth in church facilities or church-sponsored activities. Please note that all persons who are employed in, or volunteer for 10 or more hours per month, at any church preschool, daycare, or other childcare program, charter school, VPK, other government-licensed program, or summer camp are subject to additional requirements under Florida statutes or DCF regulations, including Level II background screening, mandatory adult:child ratios, educational certification requirements, and, in some cases, mandatory reporting requirements which are not addressed in this policy.*

## Requirements for volunteering with children and youth:

- 1 Be a member or actively involved at ROLUMC for 6 months.
- 2 Read, understand and agree to everything written in this policy.
- 3 Complete the Staff/volunteer Application Form.
- 4 Fill out a Florida or National Background Request conducted through River of Life UMC (**Renew every 3 years**)
- 5 Must have on site training in the area of volunteering.
- 6 Youth helpers under the age of 18 can assist with activities but should not be considered an adult volunteer and should be supervised themselves.
- 7 **Three Year Rule: All screened adults supervising children/youth and youth staff must be at least 3 years older than the age group they are supervising. Adults who do not meet this criteria must be under the direction of a screened adult who is at least 3 years older than the age group.**

## Definitions

### A. "Child" and "Youth" and "Adult"

Following the model of the public school system, a "**child**" is under the age of 12 years. A "**youth**" is anyone at least 12 years of age but not yet 18 years old or anyone 18 years old or older who is still attending high school. An "**adult**" is anyone 18 years of age or older who has finished high school.

### B. Church Personnel

For purposes of this CYPP, "**Church Personnel**" are defined to include the following:

- "**Paid Staff Person**" is anyone employed by the church, including all appointed or supply clergy and all other staff on the payroll of the church.
- "**Adult Volunteer**" is any adult not paid by the church who serves in any position involving the supervision or custody of minors, including volunteers in the nursery, daycare, schools, Sunday School, VBS, drivers, and chaperones. Adult volunteers who are not screened must be supervised by a screened adult or screened adult paid staff person.
- "**Screened Adult**" is a volunteer or paid staff person who has undergone the church's screening process. A screened adult does not need to be a church member but must have been a regular attendee and active participant in church activities for at least six (6) months prior to undergoing the screening process. Exceptions to the 6-month rule: the spouse of a newly-appointed clergy or a transferee from a FL

UMC congregation, upon verification of screening and participation from the prior church.

- Not included in the definition of **“Church Personnel”** are **“Youth Helpers”** or **“Youth Staff.”** Youth helpers (below the age of 18 or 18 or older and still in high school) may assist in activities involving children/youth but must be supervised by at least one screened adult at all times. Youth staff must also be supervised by at least one screened adult if assisting in any child/youth activity.

### **C. “Regularly Work With or Around Children/Youth”**

For purposes of this Policy, the following are included in the definition of church personnel who **“Regularly Work With or Around Children/Youth:”**

1. All clergy whether appointed or otherwise who are engaged in ministry or service to the church.
2. All paid staff persons, except those whose duties are performed entirely when children/youth are not present.
3. All paid staff persons whose living quarters are on the grounds of the church or related entity.
4. Adult volunteers whose service regularly takes them throughout the church facility or grounds or who have keys to church buildings.
5. Adult volunteers who supervise or assist with supervising children or youth in ministries, programs, or activities more than 3 times per year.
6. Adult volunteers who transport children/youth without other adults in the vehicle more than 3 times per year.
7. Adult volunteers who participate in overnight activities with children/youth more than 2 times per year.
8. Adult volunteers who assist in the nursery more than 4 times a year.

### **Procedures**

#### **CLASSROOM**

1. At least one screened adult will be present for all classroom activities involving infants, toddlers, and children. When feasible, there should be two screened adults present. If the two adults are family members, it is preferable that a third adult be present. In addition, a designated person should periodically check each classroom. Two persons in the classroom is the expectation, and at least one of them must be a screened adult.
2. **Windows/Open Doors:** Each room set aside for children/youth must have a door or wall with a window, half doors, or open doors. Windows in doors tend to remove the opportunities for secrecy and isolation, conditions every child abuser seeks. Half doors should be considered for Toddler to Second Grade children to keep them from wandering outside the classroom.

3. Touching a child in an area that would normally be covered by a bathing suit is strictly prohibited.
  - i. Exception for this would be the necessary hygienic care necessary for changing diapers in the nursery.
  - ii. Changing diapers should be in the presence of other adults or in an open area.
  - iii. Diapers are not be changed by a male worker.
4. Staff/volunteers shall not pick up children or carry them on their shoulders (toddlers/babies in nursery are exceptions).
5. Children are not to sit on staff/volunteers laps (nursery exceptions can be made in the presence of other workers).
6. Side hugs only are to be given children or youth. The exceptions would be the nursery, for example, if a child initiates a hug. We should ONLY initiate a SIDE HUG.
7. We do not kiss children and we do not let children kiss other children. There should be NO lip contact.
8. Discipline (Warning System based on Matthew 18:15-17)
  - i. Verbal warning by teacher **and parents advised**
  - ii. Separation from group by teacher (time out)
  - iii. Church Paid Staff notified and parents advised **again with teacher**
  - iv. Pastor/**Parent Conference**
  - v. **If misbehavior continues after item iv., consider removing child or youth from program for a designated time period agreed upon between parent and paid staff.**

Guidelines for Appropriate methods of Discipline in classroom:

- a. Some ways to help with discipline is to change seating arrangements; sit by a disruptive student and gently lay your hand on their shoulder **and informing him/her to correct their behavior.**
- b. **Escort child away from group to address their misbehavior while still within eyesight of other adult leadership.**
- c. Encouraging words help influence behavior better than negative words.
- d. Spanking, pinching, yelling, belittling, swearing (**or any** abusive language) or public scolding **are** not acceptable.

### **MENTORING PROGRAMS**

1. **Although mentoring programs inherently promote the development of a one-to-one relationship between an adult mentor and a child/youth, such programs should be conducted in a public setting in compliance with the other requirements of this policy, including:**
  - i. **at least two adults be present at all times, one of whom must be a screened adult.**
  - ii. **screening of all mentors who serve on a regular basis,**
  - iii. **the open-door policy is observed.**
2. **Mentors may not give gifts to individual children/youth without the knowledge of their parent/guardian. Gift giving should be done on a group basis or for special occasions only (such as birthday, Christmas,**

- confirmation, graduation). Gifts should be modest and appropriate for the occasion. Mentors must never serve as a financial resource.
3. The general prohibition on one-to-one communications between church personnel and children/youth is relaxed in the context of mentoring relationships; however, mentors must obtain permission from the parent/guardian regarding the forms of communication a mentor may use in communicating with a mentee.

### **RESTROOM USE (KINDERGARTEN - 5TH GRADE)**

- 1 Volunteers/staff should only enter a restroom stall when absolutely necessary.
- 2 NO MALE ASSISTANCE PER FLORIDA LAW. If a child requires assistance, it must be given by a qualified female staff.

### **RESTROOM USE (PRESCHOOL/NURSERY)**

- 1 Children should be encouraged to use the restroom independently. With this age, help is sometimes needed. Helpers, please remember to use gloves when assisting with "potty" use. Close the half-door for the child's privacy when assisting a child. NO MALE ASSISTANCE PER FLORIDA LAW.
- 2 Diapers are to be changed only in designated areas in the presence of other workers. The diaper changing should ONLY be done by a screened adult. Males are not to change diapers, per Florida law.

### **Kidcheck CHECK-IN/OUT (PRESCHOOL - 4TH GRADE)**

Check in procedures will be used for all children through 4<sup>th</sup> grade on Sunday mornings.

- 1 All children must wear name tag printed by Kidcheck system and parents keep receipt.
- 2 Upon Pick up the guardian receipt will be turned into the classroom teacher and recorded on the clipboard by the door.

### **COUNSELING OF YOUTH AND CHILDREN**

In instances of youth or child counseling where circumstances dictate that counseling would be most effective on a one-on-one basis, an appropriate **Screened Adult** person may meet individually with a youth with the knowledge of at least one other paid staff member. At any counseling session with children or youth, the door of the room used should remain open for the entire session, unless there is glass in the door or wall which gives a clear view into the room. If another adult is not in the building when the counseling occurs, the session should be moved to a public place, such as a restaurant or outside where other people are present.

### **TIME FOLLOWING GROUP EVENTS**

Following child/youth group events, it is inevitable that occasionally a child's/youth transportation arrive after all other participants have departed. In those circumstances, a child/youth may unavoidably be

supervised by one screened adult. Under these circumstances, the general rule requiring the presence of two screened adults is suspended and the screened adult (preferably staff) is responsible for exercising his/her best judgment for the participant's well-being.

In an emergency, and only with the express permission of the parent/guardian, a screened adult may transport a child/youth home, provided that the transportation complies with the requirements set forth below.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

### **A. General Rules**

Transporting children and youth is an important concern. Their safety can be at risk in a variety of ways. This Policy includes both Requirements that must be followed and recommended Guidelines. Whenever feasible the recommended Guidelines should be followed, allowing for the use of discretion and good judgment depending upon the event attended, the locale of the event, and the age group participating.

### **B. Requirements**

1. Drivers must be known to the designated adult leader of the event.
2. When a child/youth is transported in any vehicle, the driver must be either the child's/youth's parent/guardian, or a screened adult or an adult paid staff person who is at least 18 years old, or a professional, licensed transportation company or charter service. If a taxi or ride-sharing company is used, the provision in V.B.3 and IV.A.1 must be followed.
3. At least two children/youth must be in any vehicle driven from church to an offsite church activity.
4. When a child/youth is transported in a church-owned vehicle, the driver must be at least 21 years of age who has undergone a motor vehicle record search has and has been found by the appointed clergy, designated supply pastor, or his/her designee to be satisfactory.
5. Drivers must have a valid driver's license for the vehicle being operated. For example, if driving a church bus, a commercial license is required. A copy of the driver's license should be on file at the church.
6. Drivers must require that seat belts be used at all times and the number of passengers must not exceed the number of seat belts.
7. Drivers should be advised of a designated route and should not deviate from it except in cases of emergency or road detours.
8. Drivers are not permitted to use cell phones or mobile devices unless required for communication with other drivers and are not permitted to text message while driving. Hands-free GPS (Global Positioning System) may be used.

9. Youth drivers are not permitted to drive from church to an off-site church activity. Youth drivers may either meet the group at the location of the church activity or must be transported from church by adult drivers otherwise in compliance with this policy.
10. When a trip is planned and the destination is expected to be 100 miles or more from the point of departure, drivers are to be listed on an "approved driver list" maintained in the church office. If the trip will exceed 500 miles roundtrip, a Church Trip Form must be completed and submitted to the Office of Ministry Protection.
11. Persons who regularly drive church owned vehicles are to be listed on an "approved driver list" maintained in the church office.
12. In order to be listed on the "approved driver list" of drivers, a Motor Vehicle Record search must be conducted by the Conference office of Ministry Protection. Call (800) 282-8011, ext. 126).
13. Approved Drivers must read and sign an acknowledgement form indicating that the Child/Youth Protection Policy has been read and will be followed (See Appendix IV).
14. These Requirements apply to each driver of each vehicle used to transport children/youth to an offsite church activity, including when multiple vehicles are traveling to the same location in a caravan.
15. Drivers should receive training for the church owned vehicle or rented vehicle being operated.

### **C. Recommended Guidelines**

1. Drivers should be accompanied by at least one other adult.
2. Youth who drive their own vehicles should be reminded regularly of the importance of vehicle safety and comply with D.9. above.

## **TRIP AND RETREAT SUPERVISION**

### **A. Requirements**

1. There **must** be at least two **unrelated**, screened adults present for all trips, retreats and other events where the children and/or youth gather overnight at, or away from, the church campus.
2. There **must** be at least one screened adult for each gender present at co-ed overnight events. At single gender overnight events, at least one of the two screened adults present **must** be of the same gender as the child/youth.
3. Church personnel are prohibited from sleeping in the same bed, sleeping bag, tent, or room with children or youth, unless the child/youth is an immediate family member of the adult.
4. When children/youth are participating in an event held in one open space, such as the church gym or camp lodge, multiple adults may

- sleep in the same space, provided that at least two screened adults are present at all times.
5. The person in charge of youth/children for each overnight trip and/or retreat **must** carry parental permission slips, including permission for emergency medical care.
  6. When groups are away from the church campus, there must be access to a phone, cell phone, or mobile device.
  7. If the outing involves a swimming pool or deep bodies of water, a certified lifeguard should be present onsite or accompany the group. If a certified lifeguard is not available, at least one adult who is certified in CPR must accompany the group.

## **B. Guidelines**

In a hotel type setting, rooms should be assigned as follows:

1. Separate rooms for adults and child/youth should be assigned with at least two children/youth per room.
2. Assignments should be made so that an adult room is between two children/youth rooms. **Whenever not feasible, the adult room should be adjacent to the child/youth rooms.**
3. **Two Adults of the same gender as those being checked should** make random monitoring hall trips and room checks at night.
4. A hotel should be selected where the rooms open to the interior of the building (i.e., do not open to the outside).

### **Use of Church Facilities by Outside Groups (enforced by Church Business Manager)**

All outside groups that use church facilities, with or without a fee, must: agree to operate in compliance with this Child/Youth Protection Policy and to ensure that all of their employees or volunteers have been trained on and agree to comply with this Policy; demonstrate that they enforce screening, safety, and supervision procedures that are consistent with this Policy. Such outside groups must provide documentation agreeing to this requirement. Having an officer of the group sign the Adoption statement of this Policy is acceptable. Church Trustees should monitor compliance in connection with any agreement to allow outside groups to use church space or facilities. Documentation should be maintained with other church records.

### **ONLINE SAFETY**

It is acknowledged that the use of computers and other electronic means of communications may be useful tools in supporting child and youth ministries. However, it should also be recognized that these forms of communication also potentially pose a unique risk.

- i. Church computers that are setup to permit guests or program participants to access the internet should be in high-traffic areas and be randomly monitored by staff or screened adults. Controls shall be in place to prevent access to inappropriate content.
- ii. Church Personnel are prohibited from using the Internet, whether via church computers or personal devices, to view or download any sexually oriented materials on church property or in the presence of children/youth.
  - a. In the event of youth ministry education involving or relating to safe sex practices, values or biblical education regarding sexual activity, if church paid staff need to search online for teaching material or media, only sites approved by Pastor may be used.
- iii. Electronic communications with children/youth should be limited to information about program dates and activities and should be made only by group emails or on the church's official website or the church's public Facebook page, or other social media platforms, of which the parents are aware and have given consent or can access publicly.
- iv. One-to-one communication with children/youth is generally prohibited. If there are extenuating circumstances that require one-to-one communication with a child/youth, the communication should be made via email or text, on which the parent or legal guardian is copied. (See Consent Form for Electronic Communications with Children/Youth – Appendix X)
- v. Church Personnel should not "friend" or otherwise initiate one-on-one connections with any unrelated youth/child on Facebook, or similar social media site or platform, or "tag" any photograph of a participating child/youth on Facebook.
- vi. Church personnel should not post photos of children/youth participating in church activities on their personal social media sites, websites, or other communication platforms, and shall not post any photos of participating children/youth on websites, social media sites, or other communication platforms hosted/owned by the church without obtaining prior written permission from the parent or guardian. (See the Photo Permission Form in Appendix IX).
- vii. No personally identifiable information of participating children/youth should be posted on line or on any social media site. Refrain from using names and do not post a last name, address, or phone number when posting photos.

### **CHILD ABUSE REPORTING**

*The moral imperative is to do that which will best protect children.* Everyone in the church has a moral responsibility and a legal duty to report suspected child abuse whenever it comes to their attention, regardless of where that abuse takes place.

1. If abuse is observed by, disclosed to, or suspected by a volunteer and/or paid staff person of the church, the observer shall report the incident immediately to the appointed clergy or supply pastors **for immediate report to the authorities as required by state or local law**. If the appointed clergy or supply pastors are not available, the matter should be reported to the District Superintendent.

**NOTE:** Follow the advice of the investigating authorities regarding whether the accused may be notified of the allegations.

2. Fill out the Incident Report Form and follow all procedures as outlined in the Florida Conference Child/Youth Protection Policy.
3. Call the Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-96-ABUSE or 1-800-962-2873.
4. **Notify the parents of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety and well-being of the child or youth until the parent(s) arrive.**

**NOTE:** If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, follow the advice of the authorities concerning notification of others.

**Church Personnel are not to undertake an investigation of the incident. In all cases of reported or observed abuse, they should be at the service of the official investigating agency and law enforcement.**

*For purposes of this Policy, child/youth abuse includes any of the following:*

**Physical Abuse:** Violent non-accidental contact which results in injury. This includes, but is not limited to, striking, biting or shaking. Injuries include bruises, fractures, cuts and burns.

**Sexual Abuse:** Any form of sexual activity with a child, whether at the church, at home or any other setting. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent or another minor.

**Emotional Abuse:** A pattern of intentional conduct which crushes a child's spirit or attacks his/her self-worth through rejection, threats, terrorizing, isolating or belittling.

**Neglect:** Failure to provide for a child's/youth's basic needs or failure to protect a child/youth from Harm.

### **Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse**

Florida Statute 39.201 entitled "Mandatory Reports" states that: "Any person who knows, or has reasonable cause to suspect, that a child is abused, abandoned, or neglected by a parent, legal

custodian, caregiver, or other person responsible for the child's welfare, as defined in this chapter,...shall report such knowledge or suspicion to the department"

While the statute is limited to situations involving abuse by a parent, custodian, caregiver or other persons responsible for a child's welfare, the moral imperative to protect children extends to other situations where abuse is suspected. Suspected abuse within the context of a church day school or pre-school does fall within the description of the Florida Statute and a report is required.

Clearly, when child abuse is suspected or observed, the moral imperative, and potentially the legal requirement, is to call the Child Abuse Hotline 1-800-96-ABUSE.

I have read, understand and agree to these procedures in the Supervision Of Children and Youth Policy of River of Life United Methodist Church.

Signature\_\_\_\_\_

Ministry Director Signature\_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**The River of Life United Methodist Church Diaper Changing Policy is as follows:**

- 1 Collect all diaper changing supply and have within reach before placing child on changing table
- 2 Place gloves on both hands
- 3 Place child on contour changing pad
- 4 Strap child to changing pad
- 5 Change diaper
- 6 Remove child from changing pad
- 7 Disinfect changing pad and surrounding area
- 8 Remove gloves
- 9 Wash hands

Failure to comply with all steps listed above puts child at risk for serious injury and will result in disciplinary action.

Please sign below that you have read and understand the River of Life United Methodist Church Diaper Changing Policy and that you agree to comply with all procedures as outlined above.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Staff or Volunteer Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Children's Director Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



**Adoption**

This Child and Youth Protection Policy is adopted by action of the Church Council of the River of Life United Methodist Church this \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Appointed clergy and supply pastors

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chair, Staff Parish Relations Committee