

**Wallingford United Methodist Church  
CHILDREN AND YOUTH SAFE CHURCH POLICY**

**A. INTRODUCTION**

Scripture and our United Methodist tradition inform us in our belief that all of human life is of sacred worth, perhaps children most of all. Hear the words of Jesus in Matthew 18:5-6: “Whoever welcomes [a] child, welcomes me. If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones...it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea.”

With The Book of Discipline we affirm that our youth and our children are full human beings in their own right but, because they are particularly vulnerable, they are our sacred trust to whom we have special responsibility (Paragraph 162.III.C.). The Church is particularly accountable to provide a safe environment for youth/children (Paragraph 161.II.H.). “Children must be protected from economic, physical, emotional, and sexual exploitation and abuse” of any kind (Paragraph 162.III.C.).

Therefore, as a covenanted Christian community of faith, it is the purpose of Wallingford United Methodist Church to conduct all youth/children related events in ways that promote the safety and spiritual growth of all of our youth/children, as well as all of the workers with youth/children who also participate in these events.

**B. SCOPE**

This policy and its provisions shall apply to all paid and unpaid staff, whether lay or clergy who have any contact with youth/children who participate in any church activities or events. For the purposes of this document, children are infant through fifth grade, youth are grades sixth through twelfth. During the summer the grade level of the child is defined as the grade that they will be entering in the fall.

**C. PURPOSE**

Our congregation’s purpose for establishing this Youth/Children’s Safe-Church Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all of our children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

**D. A HIGHER STANDARD**

As ambassadors of Jesus Christ, we must strive to be worthy of a very high standard of trust. For this reason, every worker at Wallingford United Methodist Church must avoid even the appearance of inappropriate behavior. All workers both paid and volunteer must diligently avoid any contact that appears wrong to a reasonable observer, even if no misconduct takes place.

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**E. STATEMENT OF COVENANT**

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all of our youth/children, as well as the workers with them. We will follow the reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; we will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events; we will educate all of our workers with children, youth, and vulnerable adults regarding the use of all appropriate policies and methods (including first aid and methods of discipline); we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law; and we will be prepared to respond to media inquiries if an incident occurs.

**F. PROCEDURE FOR UPDATING AND REVISING THE YOUTH AND CHILDREN SAFE-CHURCH POLICY**

**1. Updating/Revising**

The Board of Stewards of Wallingford United Methodist Church shall have the authority to revise and update these policies on an annual basis or at the request of leadership or Policy Coordinator.

**2. Waiver of Policies**

Portions of this policy may be waived on occasion for exceptional circumstances. The goal of Wallingford United Methodist Church is to promote safety while maintaining practical flexibility in children and youth ministry. Waiving portions of the policy will only be authorized by the Policy Supervisor and/or in consultation with the program staff person in charge.

**3. Modification of Policies**

This policy may be modified or withdrawn by Wallingford United Methodist Church's Board of Stewards at any time. These policies are not intended to create an implied or express contract with any person. They are not intended to create a legally enforceable or binding promise or representation.

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**I. YOUTH AND CHILDREN ACTIVITY GUIDELINES**

**A. GENERAL SAFETY REQUIREMENTS**

1. Parents shall be given advance notice regarding any church-related activities or meetings for their youth/children.
2. All local churches must be insured for abuse, risk, and facility hazards.
3. Any activity that has a physical risk associated with it requires the presence of an experienced and/or certified guide or instructor. For example, swimming, river rafting, rock climbing, challenge course, or other risk-related activities. Participation in these activities shall also be properly insured with a certificate of liability. If the activity is contracted to an outside party, then the contractor shall also be properly insured with a certificate of liability insurance providing a minimum of one million dollars liability coverage limits.
4. Medical permission forms are required from all youth/children participating in youth outings. These forms shall accompany the adult coordinator of the event or meeting and shall include a waiver of liability. In the case of an accident that requires medical attention, the person who is responsible for the event or the meeting will use all means possible to contact the parent, guardian or emergency contact while ensuring that the youth/children receive the proper care.
5. Children/youth requesting alone time at an event will be monitored appropriately.
6. If anyone notices unrecognized people at an event, the event or meeting coordinator shall be informed as soon as possible.
7. There shall be no "in and out" privileges for youth/children. Exceptions to this rule shall be approved by the event leader.

**B. DRIVING REGULATIONS**

1. Drivers to all church sponsored outings shall possess a valid driver's license, appropriate insurance and the driver's record shall conform to any standards that are required by the church's insurance company.

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2. If an adult other than a parent or guardian provides rides to or from a church event or meeting for youth/children, the parent or guardian must give written or verbal consent.

**C. OVERNIGHT EVENTS**

1. A minimum of two adults shall be present at overnight events.
2. There shall be at least one adult in the sleeping quarters; two adults are required if less than three youth/children are present.

**D. POLICY SUPERVISOR**

1. Wallingford United Methodist Church shall have a designated Policy Supervisor, laity or clergy, paid or volunteer, whose job it is to see that State Patrol background clearances are made for all volunteers. (Staff Parish Relations Committee is responsible for checking references and backgrounds for all paid staff.) This person will keep the background checks in a safe space. They are also assigned the responsibility of developing, overseeing and reviewing the training of all staff and volunteers. This training may include the following subject areas:
  - Appropriate boundary guidelines
  - Types of abuse, the relationship between imbalances of power and abuse
  - Causes and indicators of abuse
  - Reporting procedures
  - What to do when you suspect or discover child abuse
  - Understanding the victim and the abuser
  - Working with abuse victims
  - Conference youth/children event policies
  - Media reporting policies
2. The Policy Supervisor is also responsible for serving as the resource person on these issues, for receiving reports of guideline misuse or reports of abuse, and for seeing that all persons who need to know of abuses are informed.
3. The Policy Supervisor is responsible for carefully documenting all aspects of an abuse incident on the Abuse Incident Report Form. This report shall be forwarded immediately to the pastor, District Superintendent, and Conference Office, and to any other group who may need to know.

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4. If a person reports that they have been abused in another setting, the Policy Supervisor shall consult with the event leaders or other oversight staff and they shall make a determination of who should be informed; which may include CPS, law enforcement, etc. In the case of a minor if the parents are not the subject of the abuse, they need to be informed as well.

**E. POLICY FOR SCREENING PAID AND VOLUNTEER STAFF**

1. An adult who works in a role that places them in direct contact with youth/children shall complete a Washington State Patrol Criminal History Check.
2. Those who are not residents of Washington or Idaho or who have resided in Washington or Idaho less than three years shall complete a national background check.
3. Prior to the beginning of each new year, the Policy Supervisor shall ensure that checks are completed for every adult who is involved in the program or will be involved. As others join, they will need to fill out background checks.
4. A criminal conviction for a sexual offense disqualifies an applicant from working with youth/children. Other automatic disqualifiers usually are convictions for incest, rape, assaults involving minors, murder, kidnapping, child pornography, domestic violence to the other parent and physical abuse.
5. No volunteer worker will be considered for any lead ministry position involving contact with children or youth until the candidate has attended Wallingford UMC for at least six months.

**II. CODE OF BEHAVIOR**

**A. RULES OF GENERAL SUPERVISION FOR ADULTS WORKING WITH YOUTH/CHILDREN**

1. The behavior of adults working with youth/children must reflect the highest standards of Christian maturity, foster trust at all times, and be above reproach. Adults engaged in church-related events or

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activities with youth/children present should never engage in sexually suggestive behavior or inappropriate touching.

2. Any sexual or sexually suggestive behavior by an adult toward any fellow worker or event participant at a church event where an imbalance of power exists between the acting adult and the other person constitutes an abuse of power. Consent is not a defense to an abuse of power situation.

Sexual harassment is any unwanted sexual advance, physical or verbal demand, or sexually suggestive behavior which is perceived as demeaning, intimidating or coercive. Prohibited behavior includes unsolicited and unwelcome contact that has sexual or coercive overtones, including:

- a. Sexually suggestive or coercive communication of any kind such as obscene letters, notes or invitations, comments, threats, slurs, epithets, jokes about gender-specific traits or sexual orientation, sexual propositions;
  - b. Any bullying or intimidation act whether it is physical contact, such as intentional touching, pinching, brushing against another's body, impeding or blocking movement, assault, coercing sexual intercourse; visual contact, such as leering or staring at another's body, sexually suggestive gesturing, displaying sexually suggestive objects or pictures, cartoons, posters, or magazines; or verbal threats, name-calling, or any unwanted gesture.
3. The following guidelines for touching are to be carefully followed by anyone working with youth/children:
    - a. Adults should use appropriate physical contact or touching and be sensitive to the child/youth's nonverbal and verbal cues.
    - b. Touching between an adult and a youth/child shall only occur in appropriate settings.
    - c. A youth's or child's preference not to be touched should be respected by adults and others. This includes youth to youth and child to child.

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4. Anytime an adult thinks that their own or another adult's behavior towards a youth/child, either touching or verbal, may have been perceived as inappropriate, that adult shall report the behavior to the leader in charge or the Policy Supervisor.
5. All adults shall avoid being alone, one-on-one, with youth/children unless parental permission has been given previously.
6. Adults shall respect the privacy of youth/children when changing clothing or showering to the extent safety allows. Adults will not be nude in front of children/youth.
7. Youth/children shall be supervised at all times by at least one adult who is at least four years older than the oldest youth/child who is attending the event as a participant.
8. There shall be one adult for every six youth/children with 3<sup>rd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> grade and middle school events and one adult for every eight youth with high school events.
9. At least 50% of adults at an event where middle school youth are present shall be at least 21 or older.
10. Adults working with youth/children shall abide by all laws and regulations applicable to the location of the event.

**B. YOUTH/CHILD BEHAVIOR**

All children/youth shall abide by all laws and regulations applicable to the location of the event. Youth will abide by the covenant established defining appropriate behavior and expectations.

**III. RESPONSES TO CODE INFRACTIONS AT AN ACTIVITY OR EVENT**

**A. RESPONDING TO BEHAVIORS THAT HINDER OUR MISSION**

In addition to the behaviors that are described above, there are other behaviors that may hinder the mission and purpose of our church or church group. Examples of these incidents include a chaperone who continually undermines program objectives or an event planner who neglects staff training or health and safety concerns, etc. When serious concerns arise:

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1. The event coordinator or leader shall encourage the person raising the concern to talk directly with the person whose behavior is considered detrimental.
2. If the person raising the concern is unwilling or unable to talk directly on their own with the person in question or if the initial conversation is unproductive, then the event coordinator or leader shall meet with the two individuals to seek resolution.
3. If a mutually agreed-upon resolution is not possible, then the event coordinator/leader shall have the authority to prescribe a resolution.
4. Anonymous complaints or evaluations shall be considered unverifiable, and, therefore, will have no foundation for being officially addressed.
5. Persons whose behavior hinders the mission and goals of the ministry or whose negative behavior is repetitive may face review of their participation in leadership for that behavior by the person or group to whom they are accountable.
6. If the person who is perceived to be hindering the mission is the event coordinator/leader then the person who is raising the concern may report to the Policy Supervisor, pastor, Staff Parish Relations Committee, or person assigned to oversee this leader.
7. The church has the obligation to inform the Annual Conference of all persons whose behavior they deem to be inappropriate for working with youth and children.

**B. RESPONDING TO INJURIES OR ILLNESS**

1. Any coordinator/supervisor who becomes aware of any injury or illness to a worker or participant shall take steps to ensure proper medical attention is given to the injured/ill person. If the injury/illness is minor, the parent or guardian should be notified of the injury when picking up the injured person. If the injury/illness requires medical attention, then the parent or guardian of the injured person should be notified along with the worker's coordinator/supervisor as soon as practical. Proper medical attention should be provided to the injured person, possibly including summoning an ambulance in the interim.

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**C. RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE**

1. All reports of abuse shall be treated with utmost seriousness and confidentiality.
2. The highest priority shall be placed on securing the safety of the victim. In no case shall the accused be confronted until the safety of the victim is secured.
3. The person who receives the report of abuse shall immediately share this information with the event coordinator/leader unless the person suspected of abuse is the event leader, then the report should be made to the Policy Supervisor, pastor, or the authorities. The event coordinator/leader or Policy Supervisor is responsible for filling out the Abuse Incident Report Form and for reporting the incident to the key leaders of the event or pastor or authorities.
4. The Policy Supervisor is responsible for carefully documenting all aspects of the incident using the Abuse Incident Report Form. This report will be forwarded immediately to the pastor.
5. The person who first hears the allegation of abuse, in partnership with the Policy Supervisor, is responsible for reporting to the Child Protective Services or to the appropriate law enforcement agency.
6. The Policy Supervisor will notify the parents when and if it is clear that it is safe to do so.
7. Any volunteer or hired staff person accused of abuse shall be immediately relieved of duties related to this or any other church event involving youth or children and be isolated from further contact with participants, guests and others who may be negatively impacted by the individual's presence until the review process is completed. The individual accused of abuse may not return to these types of duties until the Policy Supervisor has completed a review. This applies whether or not the alleged act of abuse occurred during a church-related event.
8. Whether or not the alleged act occurred during a church-related event, the leader and Policy Supervisor shall jointly review the incident to determine whether any additional actions are required. They shall also report the incident to appropriate parties (i.e., civil authorities, the Conference insurance company, the pastor, etc.).

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9. If the incident is put under investigation by appropriate civil authorities, the investigation will be monitored by the Policy Supervisor and church officials until there is an outcome. All investigating will be the responsibility of civil authorities.
10. If there is no civil investigation or once the investigation by civil authorities is completed, the Policy Supervisor and/or leaders shall jointly review the incident to determine whether any further actions are needed.
11. The Policy Supervisor is responsible for contacting the accused and informing the accused of the nature of the process. The purpose of this meeting is not to interrogate the accused but to discuss the accusation. During meetings with the accused, one other mutually agreed-upon witness shall be present (e.g., a local pastor, district superintendent, etc.).
12. After conducting a thorough review, the Policy Supervisor shall report the findings to the accused.
13. If it is determined that the person has committed an act of abuse, the Policy Supervisor, in conjunction with other church leaders, will develop an appropriate plan which may include outside professional consultation and/or the establishment of a behavioral covenant.
14. All documentation relating to the incident shall be confidentially filed in the Policy Supervisor's locked files.
15. Appropriate notification should be made to the Conference Office.

The church's obligations to respond to allegations of abuse go beyond the State's requirements. As Christians, we must also be prepared to respond to others:

- Faithful response to the victim — take the allegations very seriously, respect victim's privacy, provide sympathetic concern, no blaming the victim, absolutely no implication that the victim was in any way responsible for causing the abuse.

Careful attention should be given to support the victim's emotional and spiritual needs during the investigation and months that follow.

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- Faithful response to the Annual Conference — notify PNW Conference authorities (District Superintendent, Bishop) as soon as allegations are received; keep them aware of congregation's actions; notify insurance agent.
- Faithful response to the media — one person must be designated as spokesperson in advance and have a well-thought out response.
- Faithful response to the accused abuser — acknowledge that the person is of sacred worth. Remove *accused* abuser from position as a worker with youth/children until allegations are fully investigated and resolved.

**IV. CRISIS COMMUNICATION**

1. A plan of response should be kept on file with clergy and program staff. The church should have an official designated spokesperson chosen by church leaders.
2. The District Superintendent and Bishop shall be informed of all investigations or allegations of abuse.
3. The spokesperson for the church should be a person who can speak calmly and thoughtfully in the glare of publicity; the person should answer questions honestly without adding extra or unnecessary information. They should be given permission to answer questions by saying, "I or we don't know at this time." NO ONE but the spokesperson is authorized to speak on behalf of the congregation. Spokesperson must be prepared to state the church's policy for the prevention of child abuse, the church's concern for the safety of the victim and all children, and the procedures the church has followed to reduce the risk of abuse. The spokesperson will have a prepared statement or written notes and not speak extemporaneously. The spokesperson will never make any statement indicating that the church does not take the allegation seriously or in any way blame the victim.