

Arcola United Methodist Church (UMC) Child Protection Policy

(This policy was reviewed and revised May 2017.)

This policy was approved and enacted by Arcola United Methodist Church's strategic council on November 15, 2001 to ensure the safety of our children and youth:

1. To protect the children of Arcola UMC from physical abuse and/or abduction;
2. To protect Arcola UMC from liability in the event of a lawsuit.

Policy Review

The Arcola UMC Child Protection Policy shall be reviewed annually by the Learning Team and Strategic Council.

Definitions

Child abuse refers to an act committed by a parent, caregiver, or person in a position of trust which is not accidental and which harms or threatens to harm a child's physical or mental health or welfare.

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).

Sections 63.1-248.3, Virginia Revised Code, states that "Any person licensed to practice medicine of 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 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 reasonable 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.

The following definitions and explanations in this section are from the Virginia Department of Social Services:

Types of Abuse

1. 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 supervision, inadequate personal hygiene, inadequate food and malnutrition.

2. Physical Abuse: A physical injury, threat of injury, or creation of a real and significant danger of substantial risk or 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. Example: asphyxiation; bone fracture; brain damage; skull fracture; subdural hematoma; bump; scalding; cuts; bruises; welts; abrasions; internal injuries; poisoning; sprains; dislocation; gunshot; stabbing wounds.

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 of omissions by the caretaker which result in harming 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.

Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse at AUMC

In an effort to create the safest possible environment within Arcola United Methodist Church (hereinafter "Arcola UMC"), several abuse prevention measures will be utilized. These measures include screening paid and volunteer workers for past child abuse convictions or expungements, 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.

Selection and Screening

1. All volunteer and paid staff who will work with children (birth through grade five) or youth (grade six to age eighteen) will complete an "Arcola United Methodist Church Children/Youth Ministry Volunteer Application." This application will be retained on file for the duration of the applicant's attendance at Arcola UMC and for one year following his/her departure.
2. All applicants for volunteer positions will be reviewed and initialed by the Director of Grow Ministries. This staff member, or his or her designee, will check references and follow-up as appropriate. A Record of Contact form will be completed for each reference contacted. At the discretion of the Director of Grow Ministries or any Arcola Church Director, follow-up may include requiring the applicant to submit to a Criminal Records check with the Loudoun County Sheriff's office and/or State of Virginia. Applicants for all paid staff, except for minors, who work with children and youth, will be required to submit to a Criminal Records check. Access to these criminal checks and any related files would be restricted to the Pastor, the Director of Grow Ministries or his/her designee, the Director of Administration and the Chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee only and the record will be locked up and stored in the church office.
3. Applicants who have been members of Arcola UMC or attendees for more than three months may list Arcola UMC members who know them well. Arcola UMC pastors, staff and family members may not be used as references.
4. Any information gained from the application or references indicating there may be a problem in allowing the applicant to work with children or youth will be referred to the Pastor for review and determination of the application's acceptance or rejection. Further, any member of Arcola UMC pastoral/professional staff having personal knowledge of an applicant may recommend in a written statement why the application should be rejected if they believe that the applicant is not equipped or suitable to work with children or youth.
5. If such a recommendation is received, or it is determined that any applicant may present a danger to our children or youth, the Arcola UMC staff member making that determination, in conjunction with the Pastor will arrange for a meeting with the applicant to discuss the situation. A decision to accept or reject the application should be made at that meeting unless it is determined that additional information should be obtained.
6. No one will be allowed to engage in any children or youth work prior to the satisfactory completion of these screening procedures.

Church Use

Leaders of community groups of children or youth who use the church facilities will be required to read the policy and sign an acknowledgement form. Church facilities will not be available to groups whose leaders refuse to read and sign the policy.

Supervision

1. Two adults must be present when supervising any children or youth on the church premises or at an off-campus church sponsored event. In the case of a married couple, an additional adult must be present. An adult is defined as age eighteen or older. The following exceptions to the two adult rule apply:

- One adult may teach or supervise children or youth in activities conducted where others can readily observe; e.g., in rooms in the same hallway where there are either windows in the doors or doors are left open and additional supervisory personnel are present in the area. These additional supervisory personnel will perform spot checks of all activities.
- One adult may drive children or youth during church sponsored activities provided there are at least two children or youth present in the car at all times.
- One adult may supervise children or youth during church sponsored, off-campus activities in a public place where others can readily observe; e.g., restaurants.

2. Every effort should be made not to dismiss students from Sunday school until church is over. This applies to all students. Parents/Guardians must pick children up in their classrooms or supervised area immediately after church or an event is over. Youth, who meet in classrooms located outside of the Worship Center, will be escorted to the Narthex in the Worship Center and parents should meet them there.

3. Teachers will not leave students unattended in any classroom or supervised area. The open classroom policy mentioned below will be instituted.

4. No child may leave a classroom or supervised area alone. Children may go to the bathroom, drinking fountain, and run errands for the teacher, etc. in pairs. This applies to all students fifth grade and under. (We also suggest that parents do not allow their children to leave worship alone to the bathroom, etc. for safety reasons.)

Open Classroom

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 or youth may be conducted by paid or volunteer staff. Church staff will report to the Pastor if he/she feels a classroom or supervised area needs additional attention.

Classroom Discipline

All teachers and worker 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, e.g., "We do not throw the 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 his/her parent or guardian. The situation will be discussed with the child's parent or guardian as soon as possible. No physical punishment or verbal abuse is to be used at any time.

Reporting Child Abuse

Should there be allegations of child abuse at Arcola UMC these procedures will be followed:

1. Treat any allegation of child abuse seriously.
2. **Immediately** notify the Pastor. He/she will then do the following:
 - **Immediately** begin documenting all procedures observed in the handling of allegations.
 - **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 Arcola UMC within 24 hours.
 - **Immediately** notify the Virginia Department of Social Services of the allegations.
 - **Immediately** notify the Parents if it is not known that they have previous knowledge (unless a parent is the accused. See #3 below).
 - **Immediately** notify the church's insurance company.

If the child abuse allegation is against the Pastor, **immediately** notify the Chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee and the District Superintendent, Kathy Abbott, by calling the District office at 703-820-7200.

3. 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, the Pastor will temporarily relieve the accused of duties, after consultation with the Response Team, until the investigation is concluded.
4. The pastors should extend whatever care and resources 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 and the accused) and their families, the pastors or church leaders should under no circumstances be drawn into discussion of the truth or falsity of the allegations which could

contaminate the investigation. Do not assign blame or take any steps that involve establishing or refuting the allegation.

5. 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.

6. Observe confidentiality for both the alleged victim and the accused until advised to the contrary by the Response Team.

7. The text of a prepared public statement should be used to respond to any press inquiries and to convey to the congregation. Be careful to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved. Any contact with the media or congregation should be handled by the pastor.