

ST. MATTHEW'S UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

CHILDREN AND YOUTH PROTECTION

POLICY AND PROCEDURES

I. Mission.

St. Matthew's United Methodist Church ("St. Matthew's") seeks to be a faith community where all God's children are accepted, invited to follow Christ, and encouraged to experience meaning and purpose for living through joyful worship, fellowship, study, prayer and service. St. Matthew's strives to provide a safe, welcoming spiritual home in which every infant, child, and youth may come to know Christ and develop a strong spiritual relationship within the Church universal.

II. Purpose.

The purpose of this policy is to help St. Matthew's provide a caring and secure environment for children and youth, as well as the adults involved in ministering to them.

III. Application

This policy applies to all activities involving children and youth that take place on premises, whether Church-related or not. This policy applies to all Church-related activities involving children and youth that take place off premises. This policy applies to all Leaders who work with children and youth, whether paid or voluntary and whether members of the Church or not.

The following definitions apply: A Leader is any adult 18 years of age or older, who is responsible for or regularly works with St. Matthew's youth and children. Children are newborn through sixth grade. Youth are seventh grade through high school.

IV. Biblical Foundation.

St. Matthew's seeks to express God's love of children and youth and to provide for their personal wholeness. This community seeks to provide an environment which is caring and secure for all persons, to reduce the risk of child abuse in any form 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 people 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. 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)

V. The Law.

Section 63.2-1509.A12 (Code of Virginia 2004) states that "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 abused or neglected 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 (Fairfax County Child Protective Services at 703-324-7400) or to the Virginia Department of Social Services' toll-free child abuse and neglect hotline (1-800-552-7096)."

VI. Types of Abuse and Neglect

Child or youth abuse is an act committed by a parent, care giver or person in a position of trust, which is not accidental and which harms or threatens to harm physical or mental health or welfare. The major categories of abuse are defined in Appendix A.

VII. Reducing the Risk of Abuse and Neglect

St. Matthew's will use several measures to reduce the risk of abuse. These measures include requiring six months of regular involvement with the church before an adult may be a Leader, providing a copy of the policy to all Leaders for their review and understanding, screening paid and volunteer workers for past abuse convictions or expungements, providing regular training, using two leaders, using appropriate discipline, and maintaining open classrooms. In addition, standards for careful and responsible driving are provided.

A. Six Month Rule

St. Matthew's will not appoint anyone as a Leader unless he/she has been active in the church for at least six months. The Pastor or Associate Pastor may approve exceptions in writing. Employed staff may be exempt from this rule but are subject to a minimum of Virginia Department of Social Services and Criminal Background checks.

B. Leader Screening

Before a person can become a Leader and annually thereafter, each person will be given a copy of this policy and directed to read it carefully. Each (candidate) Leader must submit a signed statement indicating that he/she has read and understood, and will abide by this policy.

The statement will ask about criminal convictions, volunteer work, prior experience with children or youth and prior church membership, as employment law allows. The statement will ask for three personal references who are not related to the (candidate) Leader. The (candidate) Leader's signature on the statement will authorize St. Matthew's to check that person's references and to conduct a criminal background investigation.

The Pastor or designee will use the information provided as a guide for determining the individual's suitability as a Leader. The results of a background investigation will be kept confidential and will not be used other than for determining this suitability.

Leaders of community groups of children or youth who use the church facilities, which include its outdoor facilities, will be required to read the policy and sign an acknowledgment form annually. Church facilities will not be available to groups whose leaders refuse to read and sign the policy.

C. Leader Training

Annually, training on this policy and abuse detection and prevention will be provided to Leaders. Training will be directed by the Commission on Protection of Children and Youth.

D. Two-Leader Rule

Leaders will be assigned in teams of two or more unrelated individuals, for all children or youth activities. The two-leader rule applies to all groups that meet at the church or on church premises and involve children or youth. There will be no one-on-one situations with a Leader and youth or child except when the pastors are engaged in counseling with the youth or child.

If the group is divided and separated by room or facility, each subgroup will have two unrelated Leaders.

If any group stays overnight at the church, or if a church sponsored group leaves the premises, two or more unrelated Leaders, at least five years older than the oldest youth, must be present. If the group is of mixed gender, then at least one Leader must be male and one must be female.

In addition, it is recommended that the following maximum ratios of children/youth to Leaders be observed.

Age of Participants	Maximum Ratio
0 to 11 months	3:1
1 to 2 years	4:1
2 to 3 years	6:1
3 to 6 years	8:1
6 to 18 years	10:1

In the event that District or Conference policy requires a smaller ratio, then Leaders are required to observe that requirement.

The Children’s Day Out (CDO) and Preschool programs conform to the Fairfax County and the Virginia Department of Social Services ratio guidelines and must comply with the County and State standards for licensure. Both programs are under the Religious Exemption for Licensure; however, ALL criteria for Licensure must be met for Religious Exempt programs. The Religious Exempt License process is done annually and is submitted, reviewed, and approved by the Virginia Department of Social Services.

E. Discipline

Neither physical punishment nor verbal abuse may be used at any time.

All Leaders will use appropriate discipline. If a child or youth is behaving inappropriately, the leader or worker will tell the child or youth specifically what he/she is doing that is not acceptable and state what the expected behavior is. If this approach is not effective, the child or youth will be guided to another activity. If inappropriate

behavior continues, the individual may be placed at a table to work alone. If the behavior continues after these steps have been taken, the individual may be returned to his/her parent(s) or taken to the Pastor and left under his or her supervision.

If an individual has to be isolated (*i.e.*, "time out"), the event must be discussed with the child's parents or guardian.

The CDO and Preschool discipline policies are set up in compliance with the National Association for Education of Young Children (NAEYC) age appropriate guidelines.

F. Open Classrooms

Doors to all classrooms or childcare rooms must remain unlocked at all times. Windows must not be covered. Church staff, parents, and church volunteers may visit classrooms at any time without prior notice. CDO and Preschool classrooms are open and available for inspection at all times. Due to the fact that CDO and Preschool are a licensed school environment, CDO and Preschool policy requires that visitors contact the Director, who will accompany the visitor to the classroom.

VIII. Driving

St. Matthew's will coordinate transportation to off-site activities sponsored by St. Matthew's. Parents are responsible for transportation to the church and when transportation is not provided by St. Matthews. When transporting youth or children to off-site activities, no vehicle will contain only one adult (driver) and one youth or child. Vehicles will contain either one driver and two or more youth or children, or two adults and any number of youth or children.

Leaders who are responsible for driving children and youth must sign a statement before each trip that indicates that the driver:

- is licensed and fully insured.
- has not been convicted of more than one moving violation in the past 12 months.
- has not been convicted for driving under the influence or driving while intoxicated in the past ten years.
- is physically able to undertake the driving assignment, including being rested and not taking any medications that may cause drowsiness.
- understands he/she is responsible for the safe operation of the vehicle.
- will ensure that all occupants are properly restrained using approved seat belts before moving.
- has the necessary medical and emergency care forms for the occupants of their vehicle.
- has checked and confirms that the vehicle has an adequate first aid kit available and accessible.
- will drive within the posted legal speed limits.
- will not drive to the point of fatigue or drowsiness.
- will take regular breaks.

- will use extra caution, employ more frequent breaks, and alternate drivers more frequently, when driving at night, in inclement weather, or any other time visibility is reduced.

Hiring professional transportation is recommended whenever feasible.

IX. Youth Covenant

All children and youth must be instructed in what is appropriate behavior and the consequences of their not abiding by the rules of appropriate behavior.

All youth who participate in church activities other than Sunday School must sign a behavior covenant indicating that they are aware of what is appropriate behavior and what the consequences are if they do not abide by the rules.

X. Commission on the Protection of Children and Youth

The Charge Conference, upon nomination by the Lay Leadership Committee, shall annually elect a Commission on the Protection of Children and Youth ("Commission"). The membership of the Commission shall include the Pastor or his designee and not less than five nor more than fifteen members of the church.

The Commission shall annually review and propose any revisions to this Policy, and shall be responsible for the administration and interpretations of this Policy.

The Commission shall meet at regular intervals and report to the Administrative Board as necessary.

The Commission shall be responsible for:

- Ensuring that the provisions of this policy are implemented;
- Amending and updating these provisions as circumstances and experiences may dictate;
- Appointing any committees required in this document and overseeing their activities;
- Assuring that all present Leaders meet the criteria and agree to the terms of the policy;
- Providing training for all Leaders;
- Informing the entire congregation of this program annually; and
- Performing such other duties as may be assigned.

XI. Reporting Abuse or Neglect

If there is a suspicion of abuse or neglect, leaders shall, in accordance with Virginia law, report the matter within seventy-two hours to the local department of social services at 703-324-7400 or to the Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline at 1-800-552-7096. Leaders shall then notify a Pastor that a report was made, unless the matter involves a Pastor. If the suspicion involves a pastor, the Chairperson of the Staff-Parish Relation Committee shall be notified immediately and he/she shall immediately notify the District Superintendent. It is not the leader's responsibility to prove or disprove that abuse or neglect has occurred. Reports to the department of social services can be made anonymously. Persons reporting in good faith are protected by the Code of Virginia from criminal and civil liability.

XII. Express Exceptions

A. Emergency

A Leader may suspend adherence to this policy to meet the needs of an emergency. When the emergency is resolved, the Leader must resume compliance. The emergency and actions taken must be reported to the Pastor or Associate Pastor.

B. Inadvertent Failure

If there is a circumstance where a Leader inadvertently fails to abide by this policy, he/she must report the inadvertent failure to the Pastor or Associate Pastor.

XIII. Annual Policy Report

The Commission will report at least annually to the Administrative Board regarding the current status of the policy and its implementation. A report also will be made annually at Charge Conference.

APPENDIX A

CHILD AND YOUTH ABUSE DEFINITIONS

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is any 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.

Physical Neglect

Physical Neglect is 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.

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.

Medical Neglect

Medical neglect includes the 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.

Failure to Thrive

A failure to thrive is 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.

Mental Abuse/Neglect

Mental abuse or neglect is a pattern of acts or omissions by the caretaker, which result in harm to a child's psychological or emotional health or development.

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.

Bizarre Discipline

Any actions in which the caretaker uses eccentric, irrational or grossly inappropriate procedures or devices to modify the child's behavior can be considered bizarre discipline.

ST. MATTHEW'S UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

CHILD AND YOUTH LEADER APPLICATION

After reviewing the foregoing Child Protection Policy and Procedures, please sign, date, detach and return this portion to indicate that you have read, understood and accept the Child Protection Policy and Procedures of St. Matthew's United Methodist Church. Please return the form to **St. Matthew's United Methodist Church, 8617 Little River Turnpike, Annandale, Virginia 22003.**

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Telephone: _____ (home) _____ (work)
 _____ (cell)

I have read and understand the St. Matthew's United Methodist Church Child Protection Policy and Procedures. I agree to abide by those policies and procedures. I have no convictions for child abuse or expungements of such convictions. I authorize and release any references that I provide to St. Matthew's United Methodist Church to provide St. Matthew's with any information (including opinions) that they may have regarding my work with children or youth. I further authorize that St. Matthew's United Methodist Church to conduct a criminal background investigation.

 Signature

 Date

Please provide three references of individuals, not related to you, that St. Matthew's may contact to discuss your experience with children or youth. You may attach a separate statement summarizing your prior work with children or youth, prior church memberships and volunteer work.

NAME	
ADDRESS	CITY/STATE/ZIP
HOME PHONE	WORK PHONE

NAME	
ADDRESS	CITY/STATE/ZIP
HOME PHONE	WORK PHONE

NAME	
ADDRESS	CITY/STATE/ZIP
HOME PHONE	WORK PHONE

ST. MATTHEW'S UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

SAFE DRIVER'S PLEDGE

As a driver for St. Matthew's United Methodist Church, I understand it is my responsibility to transport youth and children safely to the scheduled activity and back to their parents or guardians. To ensure the safety of those in my care, I pledge that I:

- Am licensed and fully insured.
- Have not been convicted of more than one moving violation in the past 12 months.
- Have not been convicted for driving under the influence or driving while intoxicated in the past ten years.
- Am physically able to undertake the driving assignment, including being rested and not taking any medications that may cause drowsiness.
- Understand I am responsible for the safe operation of the vehicle.
- Will ensure that all occupants are properly restrained using approved seat belts before moving.
- Have the necessary medical and emergency care forms for the occupants of their vehicle.
- Have checked and confirmed that the vehicle has an adequate first aid kit available and accessible.
- Will drive within the posted legal speed limits.
- Will not drive to the point of fatigue or drowsiness.
- Will take regular breaks.
- Will use extra caution, employ more frequent breaks, and alternate drivers more frequently, when driving at night, in inclement weather, or any other time visibility is reduced.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Drivers License Number: _____ State Issued: _____

Telephone: _____ (home) _____ (work)

_____ (cell)

I have read, understand and agree to abide by the above safe drivers pledge of St. Matthew's United Methodist Church.

Signature

Date