

Etowah United Methodist Church

Safe Sanctuary Policy

Purpose:

Etowah United Methodist Church staff and members are committed to maintaining a safe environment in which children, youth and at risk individuals are protected from abuse and neglect. Our goals are to protect children, youth, and at risk individuals involved in church programs, to educate workers and caregivers concerning abuse issues, and to protect staff and volunteers, as well as the church as a whole, from potential allegations of abuse and neglect.

Definitions:

For the Purpose of this policy, the use of the term "**Youth**" shall refer to any person under eighteen years of age. The use of the term "**Adult**" shall refer to any person at least eighteen years of age. The use of the term "**Minister**" shall refer to persons ordained and lay staff persons, who are employed to work with specific work area ministries of Etowah United Methodist Church. "**Ministry**" shall refer to specific work areas with children/youth and/or at risk individuals at Etowah United Methodist Church. "**Ministry Leader**" shall refer to the staff person who has direct supervision of a particular work area or work area event. "**Lead Ministry Position**" refers to the volunteer leader of a ministry area or event. "**Worker**" refers to any volunteer that serves in a ministry area but not in a leadership capacity. "**At risk individual**" refers to any adult that due to physical or mental disability is at risk for potential abuse by another individual.

1. Volunteer Screening Procedures

- a. Prior to consideration for a position, any candidate who may be working with children, youth or at risk individuals shall complete and return a Covenant Statement and Volunteer Application. (Form attached)
- b. The Covenant and Application shall be carefully reviewed only by the Office Manager or a member of the Staff Parish Committee.
- c. If the applicant appears to be appropriate for the ministry work, then references may be checked to confirm the information provided on the application.
- d. Should Etowah UMC have sufficient reason to believe that an applicant poses a threat to children, youth or at risk individuals and/or has any prior history or conviction of physical or sexual abuse directed against another person, then such

applicant shall be immediately removed from consideration for a ministry position in this work area.

- e. A criminal background check will be performed through an appropriate agency approved by the Church Council. All volunteers working with youth will have a background check every 3 years. All Volunteers that drive for events will have a background check performed before each trip.

2. Employee Screening Procedures:

- a. All persons applying for an employee position with "Youth" and/or at risk individuals will submit an employment application including a covenant statement, regardless of ministry position being considered.
- b. Employee screening, hiring and employment practices will be managed through the Staff Parish Committee.
 - i. In addition, a criminal background check shall be performed

3. Waiting Period

- a. No volunteer worker will be considered for any lead ministry position involving contact with children or youth unless the candidate has attended Etowah UMC regularly for at least six (6) months, or is personally known to the ministry leader and has met the screening criteria above.

4. Supervision

- a. At least two adults (over 18) should be present during youth activities, including events that require vehicle travel and program events off-campus. Exceptions are permitted with the approval of the parent and the ministry leader.
- b. During services or events, two adults shall be in each classroom. If two adults are not present in each classroom and there is not a glass panel in the door, then the door to the room will be left open. In addition, an adult should be available to roam in between classrooms in order to monitor activity inside and outside the room(s) where the service or event is held. **(Rule of Two Adults)**
- c. **Buddy System:** Volunteers shall make sure youth have a buddy close to their age accompany them if they leave the classroom or activity area to get supplies, go to the restroom, etc., so that no child is ever alone while in the church building or at an outside activity.

- d. Employees and lead adult volunteers should be at least 5 years older than the oldest child/youth being supervised. No one under the age of 18 should be given supervisory capacity. Youth can participate in children's activities as "helpers" as long as other Safe Sanctuary Procedures are followed. They may not count as one of the adults in Section 4a.
- e. **Restroom policy:** Volunteers/staff accompanying child or youth needing assistance to the restroom should leave the hallway door open and the stall door ajar.

5. Travel

- a. Any church sponsored activity that requires travel from the church or overnight travel must have the written permission and medical insurance information from the parent or guardian of each child/youth, and where necessary, the approval of the Pastor or Youth Director. The permission/medical information forms must stay with the coordinator for the entire trip.
- b. The "Rule of Two Adults" should be followed when traveling. On overnight youth or mission trips, there should be at least one adult of each sex. There should be an attempt to have 1-2 adults of the same sex in each room. No adult shall share a bed with an unrelated youth.
- c. No youth should drive to any outside youth activity without permission from their parent and Youth Director. No youth may ride with another unrelated youth to an outside youth group activity without written parental permission to the Youth Director.

6. Discipline

- a. Persistent disciplinary issues shall be reported to the volunteers' coordinator/supervisor and the child's parent(s). No individual is to spank, hit, shake, or otherwise physically discipline anyone. Etowah supports a process of redirection, timeout, and as a last resort, removal from the classroom/activity area with the child taken to the parent(s) or the Youth Director.

7. Injuries or Illness

- a. A suitable approved substitute, who meets the criteria set forth in this policy, shall be used to take the place of volunteers who are ill. If it is not possible to

find such a substitute, then only substitutes who are personally known to the relevant ministry leader for at least six months shall be used

- b. Any coordinator/supervisor who becomes aware of any injury to an individual shall take steps to ensure proper medical attention is given to the injured person. If the injury is minor, the parent or guardian should be notified of the injury when picking up the injured person. If the injury requires medical attention, then as soon as practical, the parent or guardian of the injured person should be notified along with the worker's Ministry Leader or Lead Ministry Position. Proper emergency attention should be provided to the injured person in the interim.
- c. The church will provide adequate insurance for our facilities in case of accident or injury to anyone participating in a church-sponsored activity. In addition, the church will carry a sexual abuse liability policy.

8. Notice of Injury, Abuse or Molestation

- a. A written incident/notice of non-minor injury report shall be prepared by workers whenever a non-minor injury occurs during a ministry function/event. The Accident Report Form shall be forwarded to the worker's coordinator/supervisor and a copy provided to the Office Manager of Etowah United Methodist Church. (*Accident Report Form*)
- b. Any person who becomes aware of any non-minor injury, any abuse or molestation or any allegation of abuse or molestation connected with any ministry activity shall immediately inform their staff ministry leader of such matter. The staff ministry leader shall immediately inform the Senior Pastor.
- c. The Senior Pastor and/or his Designee shall be responsible for determining the appropriate action to be taken with the approval of the District Superintendent. In the event of a conflict, the District Superintendent shall have the final local authority in the matter.
- d. In the event that the Senior Pastor is implicated, the chairperson of the Staff-Parish Committee shall be notified and he/she shall notify within 24 hours the District Superintendent.
- e. If any complaint comes to the attention of the media, only the Senior Pastor, District Superintendent, or their designee will be authorized to make releases of information to the media. This person will be the only person authorized to

convey information on behalf of Etowah United Methodist Church concerning the situation, so as to avoid compromising any ongoing investigation, and shall convey only such information as is deemed necessary under the circumstances.

9. Violation of Policy or Procedures

- a. Workers shall promptly notify their coordinator/supervisor of any activity undertaken on their own behalf or by others which violates this policy or procedure.
- b. Any coordinator/supervisor or ministry leader at Etowah United Methodist Church who becomes aware of a violation of the policy or procedures shall take all necessary steps to ensure future compliance with the policy and procedures by all workers; and shall remove workers from their position if such removal is warranted, or if the workers pose a potential threat to others.
- c. Any employee of Etowah United Methodist Church who is the subject of an investigation shall be removed from his or her position, with pay, pending completion of the investigation. However, if the employee admits to the abuse or molestation, then he or she shall be immediately terminated in accordance with Etowah United Methodist Church employment practices.
- d. Any volunteer worker who is the subject of an investigation shall be removed from his or her position pending completion of the investigation.
- e. Any person who is not found innocent of alleged abuse or molestation shall be removed from work with youth and at risk individuals at Etowah United Methodist Church.

10. Policy/ Procedure Revision

- a. This document shall be regularly reviewed and modified accordingly by the Church Council in accordance with the Book of Discipline.