

# CHILDREN AND YOUTH PROTECTION

## *Hillside United Methodist Church*

### **Polices & Procedures**

*Date Approved/Revised: July, 2003/May 2007*

*Approved By: Administrative Board Child Safety Task Force & Hillside Staff*

## **Statement of Policy:**

Guests of Hillside United Methodist Church come from a variety of experiences, backgrounds and needs. Many of Hillside's ministries serve young married and single adults who have children in our preschool, children and youth areas. Church leadership is committed to providing an environment which is as safe as possible for children and youth who attend the church or any church sponsored programs or activities, and to take the necessary precautions to protect church leaders from accusations or suspicion.

Church leadership recognizes the need to have formal, written policies and guidelines to help prevent the opportunity for, or the appearance of, abuse to a minor. The following procedures are not based on a lack of trust in a particular worker but instead are needed to protect our, children, youth, employees, volunteers and the entire church body.

*"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them." Mark 10:14, 16*

*"Now it is required that those who have been given trust must prove faithful."  
1 Corinthians 4:2*

## **Procedures:**

### **1.0 GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

.01 By fostering awareness of both appropriate and inappropriate behaviors in the presence of minors, Hillside United Methodist Church, as part of the body of Christ, will demonstrate Christian love and respect for one another.

.02 Leadership recognizes that certain people have exceptional talents for teaching and supporting the growth and development of our children and youth and we wish to encourage them to use their spiritual gifts. At the same time, however, we have set certain criteria for those adults who choose to serve in this capacity in order to protect the well-being of our children and youth, as well as to provide role models who do not have a history of poor judgment..

.03 We rely on God's wisdom in developing, implementing and carrying out His will through these guidelines. Compassion and truth will be the guiding forces for any investigation, reporting or follow-up action that results from the procedures as outlined in this policy.

.04 Congregational support is critical for these policies and procedures to be effective. The limited nature of our resources, and our desire to devote as much as possible to the work of the Lord, dictate that this policy be fully understood by our congregation and extended family. This will enable staff and leadership to do what is within their power to preserve the church resources for the work of the Lord.

.05 For purposes of this policy and associated procedures, “children” is defined as those individuals aged 12 and under. “Youth” is defined as those individuals between the ages of 12 and 19 years old.

## **2.0 PROHIBITED BEHAVIOR**

.01 While all workers, both paid and volunteer, are expected to behave with honesty and integrity, the following behaviors are expressly prohibited:

- Intentionally threatening physical injury or inflicting physical injury upon a child or youth.
- Committing any sexual offense against a child or youth, or engaging in any sexual contact with a child or youth.
- Intentionally exposing any child or youth to materials of a sexual nature, including but not limited to electronic media.
- Making any kind of sexual advance, or making a request for sexual favors, or engaging in other verbal, visual or physical conduct of a sexual nature.
- Attempting to care for children or youth while under the influence of alcohol, illegal substances, and/or mind-altering drugs.

## **3.0 WORKER ENLISTMENT AND SCREENING**

.01 All paid workers and volunteers with preschool, children and youth are to complete the *Screening Form for Those Working With Children or Youth* ([Form No. 12-13](#)). All paid workers and volunteers must authorize a criminal records background check and be cleared for work with children and youth prior to being allowed to either volunteer or work with children or youth. The background check is to be completed within a 14 day period prior to the scheduled start date.

- .02 Applicants who have not been Georgia residents for at least five years must also authorize a national criminal background check.
- .03 Volunteer and paid workers must renew their criminal background check every three years if continuing to work with children or youth.
- .04 A pastor or ministry leader responsible for that particular ministry area will interview all children and youth paid and volunteer workers
- .05 All workers, volunteer or paid, will be asked to provide personal references on the above mentioned *Screening Form* ([Form No. 12-13](#)).
- .06 Individuals who have been convicted of any felony more recent than five years prior to application, excluding traffic violations, are ineligible for employment, nor are they eligible to serve as a scheduled volunteer worker in any church sponsored activity or program for children or youth. Applicants with a record of traffic violations will be screened for appropriate assignment of duties.
- .07 No one convicted of either sexual or physical abuse may be utilized in ministries to children and youth. Nor will they be employed for any church sponsored activity or program for children or youth.
- .08 It is recommended that those applicants known to be adult survivors of child abuse meet with the Director of the Counseling Center prior to working in children or youth ministry areas.

#### **4.0 GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEERS AND PAID WORKERS IN CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS**

##### **4.1 Worker Conduct**

- .01 Two adults should always be present in each room where children are present.
- .02 Classroom doors should be kept open at all times.
- .03 If there is to be a temporary change in assigned classroom space, the ministry leader must be informed and approve the change.
- .04 Each room or ministry area shall maintain a *Master Child Care Registration Log* ([Form No. 11-26](#)), or equivalent ACS report Any special information provided by the parent shall be kept on a *Parents' Instructions/Baby's Schedule* form ([Form No. 11-29](#)) or applicable department report. All such logs and instruction reports must be taken with the class or ministry in the event of a fire or other emergency requiring the evacuation of the room so that attendance can be taken after the evacuation.

- .05 Care should be taken by both paid workers and volunteers so that young children do not leave the classroom unattended.
- .06 Classroom doors must not be locked while occupied unless an emergency lock-down has been declared.
- .07 Volunteers and paid workers are expected to wear their assigned name tags while on duty.
- .08 With preschool and kindergarten children, only a parent, legal guardian, or other person specifically designated by the parent or legal guardian and known to the paid worker or volunteer may check children out of a ministry area. Parents will be requested to provide the Preschool Director and/or Director of Children's Ministries with any special information regarding a possible child custody dispute where leadership should pay particular attention to who picks up the child. Sixth grade and older children may be released at the end of class unless the parents provide special instructions to the contrary. On Sunday morning when the parents must pick up a child, the parents should do so immediately after the worship service and before going to other activities unless prior arrangements have been made with the supervising staff member.
- .09 Children should wear a nametag to allow easy identification.
- .10 Touching to comfort or affirm a child in an age-appropriate manner is permitted. Children in first grade or older should not sit in the lap of adult workers. Volunteers and paid workers shall not touch children in genital areas except as necessary to change a diaper or to assist a child in the bathroom as noted below.
- .11 The Director of Children's Ministries shall prescribe, and communicate to the paid staff and volunteers, precautionary measures for dealing with dirty diapers, blood, vomit and the like, such as the use of protective gloves. Any items needed for the precautionary measures will be provided by the church. These guidelines will be updated as new knowledge becomes available.
- .12 Either men or women may change diapers if it is done in the open and not behind closed doors.
- .13 Only adult female paid workers or volunteers may assist children in the bathroom and only where necessary in the case of handicapped individuals and small children. Special arrangements, which may include a male paid worker or volunteer assisting an older handicapped boy in the bathroom, may be made with the consent of the parents and the Preschool Director or Director of Children's Ministries. If documented consent is not available, a parent or guardian will be paged or summoned for assistance.

.14 When a child is taken to a bathroom outside the classroom, an authorized adult must check the bathroom before the child is permitted to enter to ensure it is safe.

## **4.2 Discipline of Children**

.01 Physical discipline by a church worker, such as spanking, is not permitted. Using physical restraint to prevent a child from doing something disruptive or dangerous is permitted and may, in some instances, be necessary. Affirmation and encouragement are always appropriate.

.02 The Director of Children's Ministries shall advise paid workers and volunteers regarding age-appropriate discipline methods.

.03 The behavior of a child who is a constant disruption to a class or ministry should be discussed with his or her parents and the Director of Children's Ministries. In appropriate circumstances, the parents may be required to attend class to observe or control the problem behavior. If the behavior persists, the child may be removed from the class or ministry area. A child who is a danger to other children is to be removed immediately and the parent or guardian is to be notified as soon as possible.

## **4.3 Continuing Education for Paid Workers and Volunteers**

.01 The Director of Children's Ministries shall encourage paid workers and volunteers to take advantage of ongoing continuing education opportunities. Some classes may be mandatory.

.02 The Director of Children's Ministries shall communicate the substance of these guidelines to all volunteers, all of whom must agree to comply with them.

.03 The Director of Children's Ministries will coordinate the mandatory training to be provided on a regular basis for fire and building safety; the statutory requirements for the mandatory reporting of child abuse; the definition of abuse; and other operational guidelines. Volunteers and paid workers who do not attend mandatory training may be relieved of their service.

.04 In concert with the Director of Children's Ministries, the Facilities Manager will conduct fire drills for every classroom area at least once each school year.

## **4.4 Communication with Parents**

.01 Volunteers and paid workers should attempt to keep open lines of communication with parents.

.02 All children who attend a class or ministry program more than three times must be registered with the children's education department. The *Toddler/Parent Information*

Form ([Form No.11-30](#)) or current ACS form will be used. Immediate registration is encouraged. The registration form will include information on special needs, disabilities, continuing medications and will be updated annually.

- .03 Parents shall always be permitted to observe in a classroom although the volunteer may tell the parent that his or her presence may be disruptive to the child.
- .04 A summary of guidelines will be made available to parents as needed or upon request.
- .05 Parents shall be clearly advised as to where to report suspected abuse or other concern regarding a classroom situation and be assured that they will not be retaliated against for making a report.
- .06 Parents shall be advised that they must pick up their children no later than ten (10) minutes after a worship service or class is over unless special arrangements are made, with consent of the workers concerned.
- .07 Parents shall be encouraged to change diapers and take children to the bathroom before class and between services to avoid problems during class.
- .08 Parents shall not leave a child if the child has a fever or other severe illness. Parents must advise the volunteers if the child is on medication.
- .09 Information concerning the sleeping accommodations for children at any overnight event shall be made available to parents.

#### **4.5 Staffing of the Children's Program**

- .01 There shall be a minimum of two adult qualified volunteers or paid workers assigned to each class, and a minimum of one adult assigned to each "break-out group" which is part of a larger class. The volunteers or paid workers assigned to a class may not all be in the same family, unless specifically approved by Director of Children's Ministries. In Kindergarten and preschool rooms, at least one of the volunteers must be female.
- .02 The ratio of workers to children should not be less than 1:4 for infants, 1:8 for pre-school classrooms and 1:10 for school age classrooms.
- .03 There shall always be a Coordinator on duty while class is in session who will make roving checks of all classrooms. The checks shall be on an irregular basis so that the time of the visit cannot be predicted from week to week.
- .04 The Director of Children's Ministries or Preschool Director shall make provision for last-minute replacements of a worker who cannot be present on a given day. If the required number of workers cannot be obtained, the class must be cancelled or combined

with another class. Combined classes must maintain the designated ratio of workers to children.

.05 Parents may be requested to work in children's classrooms to fill in or substitute for other volunteers.

.06 To ensure sufficient availability of substitute volunteer workers, the Children's Ministry Team shall develop a program to encourage parents to undergo the volunteer screening process.

## **5.0 GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEERS AND PAID WORKERS IN YOUTH PROGRAMS**

### **5.1 Physical Contact**

.01 Back rubs, neck rubs, massages, kissing, or similar contact is not allowed. Side-by-side hugs are to be used instead of full body contact. Touching need not be completely avoided, but staff and volunteers must be aware of how it looks and how the person being touched may interpret the contact.

### **5.2 Staffing Considerations for Planned Activities**

.01 Except as noted below, a minimum of two adults who have completed the required screening and training should be present for all youth activities. While a minimum ratio of one leader to every twelve youth is required, the actual ratio should be appropriate for the activity being undertaken. The youth's parent or guardian must grant any exceptions to the two-adult rule and the Youth Pastor should be contacted in advance and advised that permission has been obtained. The only exceptions to the "two adult" rule are (1) Sunday morning Sunday School classes conducted at the church and (2) small groups with a single adult leader conducted in the same location at the same time as other small groups with at least one other adult leader.

.02 Youth workers cannot be responsible for supervising youth more than 30 minutes prior to or immediately following an event's scheduled start and end times, unless specific arrangements have been made in advance. Staff and volunteers need to make certain that parents and/or guardians understand the parameters and limitations of church sanctioned supervision.

.03 Any one-on-one meeting involving a youth must be conducted with the door open, unless there is an unobstructed window view into the meeting place. Planned one-on-one meetings with members of the opposite gender must be held on church property or during a church supervised event such as a retreat or mission trip.

.04 At no time shall a youth worker pursue a dating relationship with a student.

.05 Co-ed youth gatherings may utilize either male or female youth workers. However, when the youth are all of the same gender, at least two adult youth workers must also be of that same gender.

### **5.3 Unplanned Meetings Between Director and Youth**

.01 Unplanned contacts between a youth and the Youth Pastors or youth volunteers shall, insofar as possible, be conducted under the same rules as are planned activities. It shall not be a violation of this policy, however, for the Youth Pastor to talk with a youth in the Youth Pastor's office or suitable meeting room with the door closed, when the youth has requested the closed door meeting, providing; (1) the door is closed for a relatively brief time, (2) the Youth Pastor keeps a log of the meeting indicating beginning and ending times, names of those present and any information that would document the purpose and outcome of the meeting, (3) the Youth Pastor informs the supervising Associate Pastor or his/her designate within 48 hours of the meeting, (4) the supervising Associate Pastor or his/her designate retains a confidential copy of the meeting log, and (5) such meetings are infrequent. Such notification may be made via confidential email. These guidelines apply to unplanned meetings in excess of two minutes.

### **5.4. Driving Rules**

.01 Only leaders or other qualified, approved individuals may drive. All drivers must show a valid driver's license and proof of insurance to the person in charge of an event. When one vehicle is used for an event, the two-adult rule still applies unless parental permission is obtained prior to the trip. When several vehicles are taken for an event, keeping the other vehicles in sight is an acceptable substitute for the two-adult rule. The number of persons per vehicle must not exceed the number of seatbelts. Seatbelts must be worn by all occupants whenever the vehicle is in motion.

.02 Leaders and volunteers who are regularly scheduled to drive in connection with a youth event may be asked to complete an *Application For Inclusion On the Approved Drivers List* ([Form No. 13-54](#)). The information on this form will be used to screen the potential driver through the church's insurance company and the State's Department of Motor Vehicles for the purpose of determining if the requested drivers' driving records indicate that he or she is a safe driver.

.03 If the event requires the use of a church owned vehicle, please refer to the *Use of Church Vehicle* policy as documented in the *Facilities Policies and Procedures*.

.04. In all cases, drivers must obey all traffic laws and model safe driving behavior, including not exceeding posted speed limits.

### **5.5 Overnight and Trip Rules**

.01 Written *Permission and Medical Consent* forms ([Form No. 7-01](#)) or authorized substitute must be completed prior to any church sanctioned trip. Two-deep adult leadership must be followed throughout the trip, with any exceptions clearly stated and approved in advance by the parent or guardian. The total number of adults on each trip will be adjusted according to the requirement of planned activities.

.02 Parent chaperons must complete a *Screening Form for Those Working With Children or Youth* ([Form No. 12-13](#)). before supervising an event sponsored by Hillside United Methodist Church located off church premises.

## **6.0 REPORTING AND INVESTIGATIONS**

### **6.1 Reporting Requirements**

.01 All volunteers and employed children or youth workers shall immediately report and document any incident of abuse or violation of the two-adult or open door policy of which they have knowledge or which they have observed. Any person making such a report shall keep the information strictly confidential.

### **6.2 Incident of Abuse Defined**

.01 An "incident of abuse" means any occurrence in which any person:

- Has threatened or inflicted physical injury upon a child, youth or vulnerable adult, other than by accidental means, or is reasonably suspected to have done so.
- Commits or allows to be committed any sexual offense against a child, youth or vulnerable adult, or engages in any sexual contact with a child, youth or vulnerable adult, or is reasonably suspected to have done so.
- With respect to a child, youth, or vulnerable adult makes any kind of sexual advance, or makes a request for sexual favors, or engages in sexually motivated physical contact, or engages in other verbal, visual or physical conduct of a sexual nature, or is reasonably suspected to have done so.

### **6.3 Reporting Procedure**

.01 The person reporting an incident of abuse shall contact:

- The Director of Children's Ministries if an incident of abuse involves a child (or in his/her absence the designated supervisor of the Director of Children's Ministry).
- The Youth Pastor if an incident of abuse involves a youth (or in his/her absence the designated supervisor of the Youth Pastor).

- An Associate Pastor if an incident of abuse involves a vulnerable adult (or in his/her absence the Senior Pastor).
- The Senior Pastor in all cases where an Associate Pastor is absent and a report is required to be made to him/her.

.02 The reporter shall inform him or her of all relevant facts with respect to the incident of abuse. Upon receiving a report of an incident of abuse, the person receiving the report, together with the reporter, shall complete the written *Suspicion of Child Abuse Report* ([Form No. 7-18](#)). However, in all cases where the alleged wrongdoer is the person to whom a report should be made, he or she shall be considered absent for purposes of this reporting procedure.

## **6.4 Imminent Threat**

.01 In all cases where an imminent threat of continued or additional abuse exists, any witness shall immediately contact the church office and request that someone in authority take immediate steps to ensure the safety of the alleged victim. After the safety of the alleged victim has been secured, the witness of the alleged abuse shall complete a written *Suspicion of Child Abuse Report* ([Form No. 7-18](#)).

## **6.5 Obligation to Report to the Child Abuse Investigators**

.01 In all cases where any child or youth worker has reasonable cause to believe that a child or youth, known to the child or youth worker in an official or professional capacity, may be abused or neglected, the worker shall make a report to the local law enforcement agency's child abuse investigators. If the child or youth worker is in doubt regarding whether a report should be made, he or she shall telephone the agency anonymously and discuss the situation with the counselor to determine whether a report should be made. The child or youth worker shall make a written record of the name and title of the counselor with whom he or she spoke and the recommendation made by the counselor.

## **6.6 Responding to the Report**

.01 When a church representative, paid or volunteer, receives a report of an incident of abuse, he or she shall immediately take all steps necessary to ensure the safety of the alleged victim. After the safety of the alleged victim has been secured, and after the incident has been appropriately documented (using [Form No. 7-18](#)), the person receiving the report shall:

- Immediately contact parents or guardian of the alleged victim to inform each one of them of the incident and shall ensure each parent or guardian has been notified. If one parent or guardian is the alleged wrongdoer, the person receiving the report

shall contact the other parent or guardian and inform him or her of the incident individually.

- Immediately contact Hillside United Methodist Church's Senior Pastor, who shall within 72 hours of the report, conduct an investigation (with the assistance of legal counsel, if needed) and determine whether there is reasonable cause to believe that the abuse may have occurred.
- Take all reasonable steps necessary to ensure that the alleged wrongdoer has no contact with the alleged victim pending investigation.
- Take all steps necessary to ensure that the alleged wrongdoer is barred from further work with children, youth or vulnerable adults pending the investigation.

## **6.7 Investigation**

.01 Upon learning of a reported incident of abuse, the Senior Pastor shall conduct the investigation under the supervision of a "Supervising Committee," which shall consist of the Senior Pastor, the supervising Associate Pastor in charge of Children's and Youth Ministries, the Director of Children's Ministries and/or the Youth Pastors, and an attorney designated by the Senior Pastor.

.02 The Supervising Committee shall ensure:

- That the investigation is kept strictly confidential and that all evidentiary privileges are maintained.
- That the investigation is thoroughly documented and that a confidential file is maintained.
- That all relevant witnesses are contacted and interviewed.
- That the interests of the alleged victim and alleged wrongdoer are protected during the investigative phase.
- That the attorney, within 72 hours of the report and in consultation with the Supervising Committee, reaches a conclusion whether there is reasonable cause to believe abuse may have occurred.

## **6.8 Conclusion of No Abuse**

.01 If the Senior Pastor concludes that there is not reasonable cause to believe the abuse may have occurred, he/she shall provide a written report to the Administrative Board of Hillside United Methodist Church.

.02 The written report shall:

- Preserve the anonymity of the victim and the witnesses.
- Summarize the allegations and the steps taken to investigate them.
- Set forth the conclusion and the reasons supporting the conclusion.
- Set forth the temporary actions taken by the Supervising Committee and also set forth a recommendation of additional action to be taken by the Administrative Board in response to the reported incident of abuse.

.03 Upon the request of any member of the Administrative Board, the Senior Pastor shall meet with the Administrative Board to discuss the written report. The Administrative Board shall have the right of access to the investigative file and the power to direct further investigation if advisable. The Administrative Board shall also have the power to take all reasonable action it deems appropriate in response to the reported incident of abuse, upon consultation with the Staff Parish Relations Committee if such consultation is required.

## **6.9 Conclusion of Abuse**

.01 If the Senior Pastor concludes that there is reasonable cause to believe abuse may have occurred, he/she shall provide a written report to the Administrative Board and shall meet with the Administrative Board to discuss the report.

.02 The written report shall:

- Identify the age and gender of the alleged victim, the alleged wrongdoer, and all witnesses identified and contacted.
- Set forth the allegations and the steps taken to investigate the allegations.
- Set forth the facts revealed by each significant witness.
- Set forth the conclusion and the reasons supporting the conclusion; and
- Set forth the temporary actions taken by the Supervising Committee and also set forth a recommendation of additional actions to be taken by the Administrative Board.

.03 The Administrative Board shall have the power to take all reasonable action it deems appropriate in response to the reported incident of abuse, upon consultation with the Staff Parish Relations Committee, if such consultation is required.

.04 In addition, the Senior Pastor shall:

- Report the incident to the appropriate local law enforcement agency's child abuse investigators. The identity of the alleged victim may only be made known to law enforcement agencies at their request as part of their investigation.
- Send notice of a claim or potential claim to Hillside United Methodist Church general liability insurance carrier and, if appropriate, the sexual misconduct liability insurance carrier, as soon as possible, but in no event later than thirty (30) days after receiving the report of the incident or such shorter period of time as set forth in any applicable policy of insurance. The Senior Pastor shall also provide the carrier with all other information and cooperation such carrier shall lawfully require.
- Cause the crisis response plan to be implemented (see Section 7 below).
- If the incident of abuse involves a member of the clergy, report the incident to the appropriate denomination office.
- Conduct all further investigations as directed by the Administrative Board.

## **6.10 Violations of the Two-Adult or Open-Door Policy**

.01 Upon receiving information indicating a violation of the two-adult or open-door policy, the person receiving the report shall document the alleged violation by completing the *Violation of Child Abuse Policy Report* ([Form No. 7-19](#)) and discuss the violation with the person violating the policy.

.02 If any person refuses to comply with the policy or continues to violate the policy, such person shall be barred from further youth or children's work.

## **6.11 Willful Violation of Expected Behaviors and Rules of Conduct**

.01 All workers, both paid and volunteer, are expected to adhere to the guidelines within this policy and to consistently follow the procedures herein. Anyone who willfully disregards these behaviors and/or rules of conduct will not be allowed to continue serving youth and children at Hillside, and may be ineligible for service in any ministry of the church.

.02 Workers arrested for any reason will be suspended from ministry service until a full investigation can be made and proof of guilt can be determined. Any worker, either paid or volunteer, who is convicted of any crime, excluding traffic violations, is subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment and/or dismissal from ministry service.

## **7.0 CRISIS RESPONSE PLAN**

### **7.1 General Guidelines**

- .01 Select a spokesperson (Senior Pastor or Executive Minister is recommended) to handle dissemination of information to staff, media and congregation. In his/her absence, the Senior Pastor will be the spokesperson.
- .02 Have ready for release, a clear position statement stating Hillside United Methodist Church's policy regarding sexual abuse of minors and established safeguards.
- .03 Select an attorney who will be present with the spokesperson while answering any investigative questions from the police or social service agencies.
- .04 Use text of prepared public statement to answer press and inform congregation. At all times, the privacy and confidentiality of all those involved must be strictly maintained.
- .05 Church spokesperson should keep in mind that information given to or obtained by news media may have a bearing on the church's liability, so careful judgment should be exercised.
- .06 Anticipate media questions.
- .07 If the spokesperson does not know the answer to a question, he or she should simply state, " I don't know, but I'll find out for you."

## **7.2 Guidelines for Spokesperson**

- .01 Be prepared.
- .02 Use an established strategy.
- .03 Be honest.
- .04 Never say "no comment".
- .05 Be clear, concise and in context. Do not answer more than what is asked. Do not volunteer information.
- .06 Take notes.
- .07 Do not ask for quote review.
- .08 Always respond to all calls and questions as quickly as possible.