

As of September 2, 2019
CHILDREN AND YOUTH ABUSE PREVENTION POLICY
“Safe Sanctuaries” of Lewisville United Methodist Church
Lewisville, North Carolina

Introduction

Matthew 18:5 says “Whoever welcomes [a] child [...] welcomes me.” Children are full participants in the life of our church; they will grow to be our leaders, both inside and outside of the church; they are our hope for the future and an inspiration to each of us. In Matthew 18:6, Jesus says “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.” Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to the little ones, the children. The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church state that “...children must be protected from economic, physical and sexual exploitation, and abuse.” Abuse within the church has the potential to be just this stumbling block, and it is our job to put a stop to this mistreatment through increased awareness policies of prevention and protection.

The General Conference of The United Methodist Church, in April 1996, and the Western North Carolina Annual Conference, in June 2004, adopted resolutions aimed at reducing the risk of abuse of children and youth in the church. It has been mandated that a policy be in place in the local churches by December 31, 2005.

Purpose:

Our congregation's purpose for establishing this Children and Youth Abuse Prevention Policy and accompanying procedures is to express our unconditional and steadfast promise to the physical and emotional safety and spiritual growth of all our children and youth.

We live in an unsafe world, so it is vital that the church be a safe haven for all youth and children. It is essential to know that abuse crosses all economic, racial and ethnic lines, and that it can occur in churches of all sizes and in all locations. In order to prevent the abuse of our children, we must first recognize that it does happen, and we must be able to identify all of its forms.

- *Emotional abuse*: verbal or nonverbal violence which causes feelings of worthlessness and shame in the child
- *Physical abuse*: acts that purposefully cause bodily harm to a child (hitting, kicking, shaking, choking, etc)
- *Sexual abuse*: any contact or interaction that an adult has with a minor for the satisfaction of the adult, which can include touching (kissing on the mouth, fondling, oral sex, genital and/or anal penetration, etc) and non-touching actions (verbal sexual comments, obscene telephone calls, exhibitionism, pornography, etc)
- *Ritual abuse*: acts committed as part of ceremonies or rites; often related to cults
- *Neglect*: abuse through negligence, including withholding food, education, clothing, medical care, appropriate affection, and affirmation of the child's abilities

It is the goal of Lewisville United Methodist Church to make this church safe for children and youth, so they may know the love and care of God in a secure environment.

Procedures:

1. Lewisville United Methodist Church in cooperation with the appropriate program directors will conduct a background check on potential paid workers for children and youth. This includes a check of all personal and professional references.
2. Lewisville United Methodist Church in cooperation with appropriate program directors and/or age-level coordinators will require all potential volunteers whose intentions are to assist child and youth programs to complete a volunteer form, which will be reviewed prior to the volunteer assuming his/her duties.
3. LUMC may include complete background checks and/or references on church volunteers (working with children and youth) at the discretion of Staff Parish Committee or others overseeing volunteer positions.
4. Every effort will be made for two adults to be present with children and youth at all times. These two adults shall be church members or active worshipers for six months before being given the opportunity to oversee children and youth programs.
5. If it is not possible for two adults to be in the classroom, there shall be roving monitors every Sunday morning during Sunday school and the door shall be left open if the door does not have windows.
6. Every room where children's programs are held must provide visibility from outside the classroom. Windows in the door or half door must be left uncovered at all times; if there is no window in the door, the door shall be left open at all times. LUMC classrooms shall not be in an isolated part of the church.
7. Youth are able to work with children, with some restrictions. No one under the age of 18 should have direct supervisory capability. Youth shall be at least 3 years older than the oldest child being supervised. There shall be an adult (at least age 18 years old) present in the classroom with the assisting youth, and no more than 2 youth should assist in the classroom.
8. Every effort will be made to have one adult present that is certified in basic first aid and CPR at every child and youth event. This training should occur on an annual basis.
Location of first aid kits shall be posted.
9. Every effort will be made to give parents advance notice and all information for all activities that deviate from the normal routine (for example field trips, etc.). Permission slips with medical information shall accompany any travel from the church. If overnight stay is required, no adult will share a bed with a minor unless it is their own child.
10. All classroom and playground equipment of Lewisville United Methodist Church will be examined annually by the Trustees, appropriate program directors, and a contractual consultant for its safety and appropriateness.
11. Parents must assume responsibility for their children when on the church premises unless otherwise supervision is offered by designated volunteers and/or paid staff.

12. Outside groups not screened by Lewisville United Methodist Church shall be given a copy of our Safe Sanctuary Policy and shall be responsible for ensuring their staff and volunteers comply with our policies. Outside groups shall sign a church use agreement stating they have received a copy of our policy to be kept on file with the LUMC Board of Trustees.

13. Insurance policy: LUMC shall maintain appropriate liability insurance to cover any liability that the church may incur in the event of an allegation of abuse.

Education and Training for Staff and Volunteers:

All new employees and volunteers shall be present at a training session before working with children and youth. Training sessions may be offered in group situations or on an individual basis. These educational sessions will include the following topics:

1. Observed behaviors of children that could indicate problems
2. How to keep children and workers safe
3. Procedures for reporting suspected abuse
4. Procedures for responding to suspected and confirmed abuse

Dealing with Questionable Background/Reference Checks:

If an applicant's criminal background check or reference check shows any indication of prior child abuse or endangerment, the Pastor will inform him/her that he/she will not be allowed to supervise activities involving children and youth.

If the applicant would like to challenge the criminal background check, the chair of the Staff Parish Committee may give him/her a copy of the background check; however, unless and until the applicant can prove that the information is incorrect, he/she will not be allowed to supervise youth or children. Lewisville United Methodist Church will encourage and support the applicant to find other facets of the church to lend their services.

The Christian Education Director, the church secretary, the church attorney and the appropriate program directors will maintain an active list of people approved for working with children and youth.

Reporting Alleged Abuse:

If a person suspects any form of abuse, it should immediately be reported to the Pastor, Christian Education Director, or any member of the church staff. The suspected person shall be removed from any contact with the minor until appropriate action takes place.

1. Provided reasonable cause is established, the proper agencies shall be alerted
 - a. Forsyth County Department of Social Services (336-703-2287)
(The adult suspecting the abuse must be the one to report the incident to the Forsyth County Dept. of Social Services. The person who receives the report at LUMC should also file a report!)
 - b. District Superintendent (by the LUMC staff member)
 - c. Insurance carrier (by the LUMC staff member)
 - d. LUMC attorney (by the LUMC staff member)
2. The adult reporting the alleged abuse shall document the incident in a detailed writing. This documenting should be completed within 24 hours of alleged occurrence.
3. The Pastor or Christian Education Director should immediately be advised in writing. If the suspected person is a church member, a staff member, or an affiliate of the church his or her supervisor should be given the report. If the suspected person is the Pastor, the report should be directed to the Chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee to be reviewed by the committee. If the review warrants, contact will be made with the District Superintendent. IMPORTANT: All matters shall remain in strict confidence.
4. All conversations should be documented in writing and provided to the appropriate supervising authority.

Response Plan to Media and Congregation

1. A media spokesperson should be appointed. This spokesperson shall be the only person to give statements to the media.
 - a. The church staff should be informed of who the media spokesperson is.
 - b. If staff receive inquiries from the media they should direct all questions to the media spokesperson. Staff should not respond by saying “No comment” or making any other statement about the situation other than, “You will need to talk to name of media spokesperson).”
2. Any person named as an alleged offender in a Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse form shall immediately be required to cease any contact with children or youth through Lewisville United Methodist Church activities.
3. Our ministry, after abuse, must be aimed at assuring justice for all and healing for those who are suffering.
4. The LUMC staff member and/or appropriate program director should keep a written record of the steps taken by the church in response to the allegations that have been made, including accurate dates and times these steps were taken.

Statement of Covenant:

Lewisville United Methodist Church pledges to carry out the ministry of the gospel so that the children and youth of this congregation are assured safety and spiritual growth. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of paid staff and/or volunteers; we shall implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events; we shall educate to the best of our ability all of our workers with children and youth regarding the use of appropriate policies and methods (including first aid and CPR); we shall have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms with the North Carolina state law; and we will be prepared to respond if an incident occurs.

Conclusion:

The congregation of Lewisville United Methodist Church is committed to expressing the love of Jesus Christ so that every child and youth will be "surrounded by steadfast love...established in the faith and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal." (From the "Congregational Pledge 2," "Baptismal Covenant II," in the United Methodist Hymnal, p 44 copyright 1989)