

# **Child Protection Policy and Procedure for Franconia United Methodist Church**

## **Biblical Foundation**

Franconia United Methodist Church (Franconia UMC) seeks to express God's love of young persons and to provide for their personal wholeness. This caring faith community seeks to provide an environment which is caring and secure for all persons. Franconia UMC further seeks to prevent child abuse of 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 they 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*

Jesus teaches us explicitly that young persons have the right and the keys to the Kingdom of God. He demonstrated this through blessing and touch. Our goal in response to this Biblical mandate is to maintain a safe, secure and loving place where children may grow.

As Christians, we must establish and maintain a nurturing, loving, safe and secure Christian environment, providing support and assistance to our children, youth, and at-risk adults, remembering that our mandate is not only a responsibility, but an opportunity and a privilege.

*"A new commandment I give you: Love one another.  
As I have loved you, so you must love one another."  
John 13:34 (NIV)*

## **Child Abuse Law in the Commonwealth of Virginia**

### **Definition**

Child abuse refers to an act committed by a parent, caregiver or person in a position of trust (even though he/she may not care for the child on a daily basis) which is not

accidental and which harms or threatens to harm a child's physical or mental health or welfare. The following definitions and explanation in this section are from the Virginia Department of Social Services

### **Types of Abuse**

1. Physical Abuse: A 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, and stabbing wounds.

2. 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 shelter, inadequate personal hygiene, inadequate food, and malnutrition.

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, fondling, verbal comments, intercourse/sodomy, pornographic pictures, exhibitionism, 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 and 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 or omissions, by the caretaker, which result in harm to 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.

## Reporting Child Abuse

According to the law of the Commonwealth of Virginia, all observed and suspected cases of child abuse must be reported. At Franconia UMC these reports will be made immediately to the pastor. In the pastor's absence, reports shall be made to the appropriate social services personnel, law enforcement officers, and medical personnel in attendance at the church (in their capacity as mandated reporters). These notifications shall be subsequently relayed to the pastor immediately.

These steps will immediately be followed in the event of suspected/witnessed abuse at Franconia UMC or church related events.

- 1) Treat any allegation of child abuse seriously.
- 2) In the case of a witnessed child abuse event, take immediate action to stop the abuse and escort the child to a safe area where neither the child nor person(s) witnessing the event are in danger. In cases where there is an actual or perceived threat to children or witnesses of child abuse, local police shall be contacted immediately. The use of the 911 Emergency Call Number is required. Then, notify the Pastor or other appropriate staff member/volunteer in authority e.g. Director of Children's Ministry, AGC Director, Director of Youth and Young Adults, etc. provided that they are not the accused.
- 3) The Pastor or designated staff member will make the necessary contacts outlined in the following steps:
  - a) All incidents of suspected child abuse must be reported within 24 hours of discovery.
  - b) Notify the District Superintendent. According to the Virginia Annual Conference Policy on Sexual Misconduct, the District Superintendent will contact the Conference Response Team if the alleged abuse is of a sexual nature.
  - c) Notify the local Fairfax County Child Protective Services Hotline at 703-324-7400 of the allegation, or call the Virginia Child Abuse and Neglect toll-free hotline at 1-800-552-7096.
  - d) Notify the parents if it is not known that they have previous knowledge and provided they are not the accused.

- a) Notify the church's insurance company. This may be accomplished by contacting the Pastor or Chairman of the Board of Trustees.
- 4) Immediately begin documenting all procedures observed in the handling of the allegation by taking notes on notepaper or by using the Franconia UMC Child Abuse Report Form provided. Ensure any report of suspected or actual child abuse is safeguarded within the Pastor's Office in a locked drawer. If physical evidence of child abuse is detected (e. g. clothing, photographic materials, body fluids), Franconia UMC staff shall be directed to isolate the area of said evidence from intrusion by all persons until police or Child Protective Service personnel arrive. In no case will non-investigative persons be allowed to tamper, remove, or otherwise disturb said evidence unless directed by a law enforcement official.
- 5) Do not confront the accused with the allegation unless and until advised by a response team or local police to do so. If the accused has assigned duties within the life of the church, that person must be temporarily relieved of their duties until the investigation is concluded.
- 6) The pastor should extend whatever care and resources are 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 pastor or church leader should under no circumstances be drawn into a discussion regarding the truth or falsity of the allegation, which could compromise the investigation. Do not assign blame or take any steps that involve establishing or refuting the allegation.
- 7) 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.
- 8) In providing such care as noted above, confidentiality is to be observed for both the alleged victim and the accused. If confidentiality issues arise, the Pastor shall be consulted for resolution of the matter.
- 9) Pray for the church and all persons affected by the allegation.

In the event of suspected abuse or neglect committed outside of a church-sponsored event of a child who attends AGC, Franconia UMC or church sponsored event.

- 1) Treat any allegation of child abuse seriously.

2) Possible scenarios, please follow the steps below:

- a) In the case of a witnessed child abuse event, take immediate action to stop the abuse and escort the child to a safe area where neither the child nor person(s) witnessing the event are in danger. In cases where there is an actual or perceived threat to children or witnesses of child abuse, local police shall be contacted immediately. The use of the 911 Emergency Call Number is required. Then, notify the Pastor or other appropriate staff member/volunteer in authority e.g. Director of Children's Ministry, AGC Director, Director of Youth and Young Adults, etc. provided that they are not the accused.
  - b) In the event a child/youth confides to a leader of an assault or rape, follow the same steps as 2A. In cases where there is an actual or perceived threat to children or witnesses of child abuse, local police shall be contacted immediately. The use of the 911 Emergency Call Number is required. Then, notify the Pastor or other appropriate staff member/volunteer in authority e.g. Director of Children's Ministry, AGC Director, Director of Youth and Young Adults, etc. provided that they are not the accused.
  - c) In the event a child/youth reports abuse or neglect and there is not an immediate threat to the child/youth's safety, immediately notify the Pastor or other appropriate staff member/volunteer in authority e.g. Director of Children's Ministry, AGC Director, Director of Youth and Young Adults, etc. provided that they are not the accused.
  - d) In the event a volunteer or staff suspect abuse or neglect, immediately notify the Pastor or other appropriate staff member/volunteer in authority e.g. Director of Children's Ministry, AGC Director, Director of Youth and Young Adults, etc. provided that they are not the accused, and only if the child/youth are not in immediate danger.
- 3) The Pastor or designated staff member will make the necessary contacts outlined in the following steps:
- b) All incidents of suspected child abuse must be reported within 24 hours of discovery.
  - c) Notify the local Fairfax County Child Protective Services Hotline at 703-324-7400 of the allegation, or call the Virginia Child Abuse and Neglect toll free hotline at 1-800-552-7096.
  - d) Notify the parents if it is not known that they have previous knowledge and provided they are not the accused.

- 4) Immediately begin documenting all procedures observed in the handling of the allegation by taking notes on notepaper or by using the Franconia UMC Child Abuse Report Form provided. Ensure any report of suspected or actual child abuse is safeguarded within the Pastor's Office in a locked drawer. If physical evidence of child abuse is detected (e. g. clothing, photographic materials, body fluids), Franconia UMC staff shall be directed to isolate the area of said evidence from intrusion by all persons until police or Child Protective Service personnel arrive. In no case will non-investigative persons be allowed to tamper, remove, or otherwise disturb said evidence unless directed by a law enforcement official.
- 5) Do not confront the accused with the allegation unless and until advised by a response team or local police to do so. If the accused has assigned duties within the life of the church, that person must be temporarily relieved of their duties until the investigation is concluded.
- 6) The pastor should extend whatever care and resources are 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 pastor or church leader should under no circumstances be drawn into a discussion regarding the truth or falsity of the allegation, which could compromise the investigation. Do not assign blame or take any steps that involve establishing or refuting the allegation.
- 7) 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.
- 8) In providing such care as noted above, confidentiality is to be observed for both the alleged victim and the accused. If confidentiality issues arise, the Pastor shall be consulted for resolution of the matter.
- 9) Pray for all persons affected by the allegation.

### **Procedure**

In an effort to create the safest possible environment within the setting of Franconia UMC, and in accordance with both the United Methodist Church Book of Discipline and the law of the Commonwealth of Virginia the following abuse prevention measures are being utilized:

1. Staff Screening: Volunteer persons desiring to minister to children or youth shall be members or active participants within the Body of Christ at Franconia UMC for at

least one (1) year. The one-year requirement shall only be modified if the volunteer wishes to serve in an assisting capacity while at the same time meeting screening requirements as listed below.

2. Before beginning ministry with children or youth, each employed or volunteer children's teacher, child care worker, and/or youth worker will be required to sign a statement indicating that he/she has never been convicted of child abuse. This screening form will include the following: general personal information such as address, place of employment, criminal convictions, prior church membership, and prior church membership and volunteer work. . Anyone refusing to sign the statement will not be permitted to work with children and/or youth in any capacity.
  - a. The screening form, once approved by the pastor and the SPPRC chair in the instance of employed personnel, will be submitted for a formal criminal background check. In the case of volunteers, the pastor shall review the form, in conjunction with appropriate lay leadership, and then submit the form for the formal criminal background check.
  - b. Pursuant to receipt of a completed and satisfactory criminal background check, ministry will begin. Should criminal background checks be returned and deemed unsatisfactory, no further participation by the individual screened will be permitted. These decisions will be made by the pastor.

### **ProActive Steps to Protect Our Children**

#### **1. Staff Training**

- a. All paid and volunteer childcare workers, children and youth Sunday School teachers and workers, and all youth leaders are required to read and sign Franconia UMC's Child Protection Policy indicating compliance.
- b. All children and youth workers will also be required to attend a minimum of one (1) training session related to the Franconia UMC's Child Protection policy at least once a year. These training sessions are offered twice a year by trained personnel.

#### **2. Vacation Bible School and Special Events**

- a. Vacation Bible School teachers and workers at Franconia UMC will be required to read the policy and sign the acknowledgment form before being able to participate in the program. This protocol also applies to all other church sponsored children and youth events.

- a. Leaders of community groups of children and/or youth who use the church facilities will be required to read and sign the Child Protection policy and the hold harmless agreement. Church facilities will not be available to groups whose leaders refuse to read and sign said policy.

### 3. Adult Supervision of Children and Youth

- a. At least two non-related adults (including at least one screened adult) will always be present for all events involving children and youth.
- b. In the event two non-related adults cannot be present in the room, a screened designated roamer will regularly check on groups with one adult.
- c. Should there be an overnight event at church involving children/youth, or should such a group leave the church premises, the gender of leadership must reflect the gender mix of the group. At no time will there be a single adult with a segment of the group.
- d. Community groups of children/youth which meet at Franconia UMC will comply with the Adult/Child Supervision policy.
- e. At no time will Franconia UMC be out of compliance with the United Methodist Church Book of Discipline and the Commonwealth of Virginia Adult/Child Supervision Ratio.

### 4. Bathroom Support

- a. If a child needs help in the bathroom, only a screened adult will be allowed to provide assistance and support.
- b. An adult/youth who has not been screened may take a child to the bathroom, but may not enter the bathroom.

### 5. Transportation of Children and Youth To and From Events-

- a. At the start of the school year, all parents/guardians will be given a release form to complete with names and phone numbers of those authorized to pick up their child/youth.



- b. If someone other than a parent/guardian is picking up a child or youth from a church-sponsored event, the parent/guardian will contact the leader by call, text, or email to inform of the change.
- c. In the event that a child is walking to or from church or church-related activity, a parent/guardian will need to contact the leader by call, text, or email.

6. Transportation of Children and Youth During Events-

- a. If transporting children in multiple cars, one adult driver is a sufficient chaperone (modifying the “two adult rule”) as long as all cars traveling together maintain “line of sight” of other vehicles in the group and all drivers are in compliance with the requirements established herein.
- b. A signed parental consent form with authorization for emergency medical care for each child is required to be current and present for all such trips.
- c. All drivers of automobiles transporting Franconia UMC infants, children, or youth shall be at least 25 years of age, covered by liability insurance, and must sign the release form allowing Franconia UMC to order a driving record check to ensure all volunteer drivers have a record of safety while driving.

7. Overnight Mission trips and Retreats off-premises-

- a. During overnight mission trips and retreats that take place off church premises, the two-adult rule is expanded to include two adults of each gender.
- b. If other churches are involved, adult leaders must ensure that Child Protection policies are still in effect by asking leadership of other churches to ensure their adults have been screened and are aware of child protection policies.

8. Classroom Discipline:

- a. All teachers and workers will use the following discipline measures:
  - i. 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 the appropriate behavioral expectations.

- i. If this measure proves ineffective, the child will be guided to another activity. If inappropriate behavior continues, the child may be placed at a table to work alone, yet remain in the room.
- ii. If the child's disruptive behavior continues after such measures have been taken, parents or guardians will be notified and asked to remove the child.
- iii. No physical punishment or verbal abuse of any kind will be tolerated.

9. Open Classrooms: Classroom and/or child care rooms may be visited without prior notice by church staff, parents and/or other volunteer church workers at any time.

10. Signing In and Signing Out: In keeping with the law of the Commonwealth of Virginia, all children under the age of 10 must be supervised, therefore the following sign in/sign out policy must be followed:

- a. Teachers and leaders of children between the ages of 6 and 10 years of age must be provided a signed statement of release as to how the children are to be released from Franconia UMC supervision.
- b. Children under the age of 6 years must be physically signed out of an event by a parent or other designated individual.
- c. In the case of older children, ages 10 and above, parents must physically take custody of the child from staff/volunteers or present a signed permission form stating that the child may leave on his or her own recognizance.

11. Reporting of Child Abuse: see above section on the protocol to be followed.

The Church Council shall review the Child Protection Policy and Procedures of Franconia UMC annually prior to the charge conference. A verification follow-up report will be made each year at Charge Conference to insure the integrity of the policy and procedures.