**Caldwell United Methodist Church**

**Child Protection Policies**

**Caldwell United Methodist Church**

**537 Main Street**

**Caldwell, Ohio 43724**

**Phone: (740) 732-4033**

**Adopted by the Administrative Council of the**

**Caldwell United Methodist Church on:**

**October 8, 2015**

**PURPOSE**

The purpose of the Child Protection Policy of the Caldwell United Methodist Church is to;

1. Provide procedure specifically designed to protect children, youth, church staff and volunteers associated with the ministries of the church.
2. Establish appropriate ways of responding to alleged, reported, or suspected incidents of abuse.
3. Provide compassionate ministry with all affected persons -- the alleged victim, the alleged victim’s family, the accused, the accused’s family, and the church family.

**CHILD PROTECTION POLICY**

Our policy is to:

1. Safeguard the children/youth of our church from abuse and neglect.
2. Comply with all Local, State and Federal Laws related to abuse and neglect
3. Respond to all allegations in a legal, fair, and compassionate manner.
4. Protect church staff and volunteers from potential false allegations of abuse.
5. Limit the extent of our church’s legal risk and liability.
6. Strengthen our Christian educational children/youth ministries.

**DEFINITION OF ABUSE AND NEGLECT**

“Child abuse” is defined in accordance with current Ohio law. At the time this policy was being written/adopted, the current law in Ohio defined child abuse to consist of any of the following:

1. Engaging in any sexual activity with a child, as defined under Chapter 2907 of the Ohio Revised Code; or
2. Endangering a child, as defined in Section 2919.22 \*\* of the Ohio Revised Code; or
3. Denial, as a means of punishment, of proper necessary subsistence, education, medical care, or other care necessary to a child for the child’s health; or
4. Restraining a child in any manner that cause injury or pain; or
5. Administration of prescription drugs to a child without the written approval and ongoing supervision of a licensed physician; or
6. Providing alcoholic beverages or controlled substances to a child; or
7. Committing of any intentional act that results in any injury or death to a child; or
8. Inflicting physical or mental injury that threatens to harm a child’s health, welfare, or safety.

\*\* In its present form, this law defines “child endangerment” to include any of the following: (1) abuse; or (2) torture or cruel abuse; or (3) corporal punishment or other physical discipline (e.g., such as spankings) or prolonged cruel restraint, which is excessive under the circumstances, and which could likely physically injure the child; or (4) repeated, uncalled-for discipline which, if continued, would seriously impair the child’s mental health or development; or (5) involving the child in any obscene, sexually-oriented, or nudity-oriented activity or conduct.

**PROCEDURES TO SUPPORT THE CHILD PROTECTION POLICY**

**I. SELECTION AND SCREENING OF CHURCH STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS**

Although our Christian concern for children/youth leads us to be saddened when any form of child abuse takes place anywhere, our major policy need is to be certain that abuse does not occur within the framework of any Caldwell United Methodist Church program or ministry with children/youth. This policy is intended to help our congregation make Caldwell United Methodist Church a truly safe and caring place. This policy shall be administered by the Church Administrative Council.

In an effort to create a safe environment within our church, each church staff person and volunteer who works with the church’s children/youth programs either regularly or occasionally, on or beyond the church grounds, will be screened and will be trained on child protection issues.

The procedure for selecting and screening is as follows (The Pastor/Staff Parish Relations Committee may set additional screening and standards for paid staff):

1. By Ohio State Law and Conference Policy, each person being considered to work with children/youth in any church program, whether as a volunteer or paid staff person, shall have a current Ohio BCI&I or FBI criminal background check before they begin working with children/youth. Every five years a new Ohio BCI&I or FBI check must be conducted. It is the responsibility of the individual seeking to work with children/youth to have this check done and the results delivered to current chair of the Church Administrative Council or the Church Pastor. (See attached form and information in Appendix A detailing how to request these checks.)
2. Each person being considered to work with children/youth in any church program, whether as a volunteer or paid staff person, shall fill out an application form. (See attached form in Appendix B)

3. Before placing the applicant in a position of responsibility, the pastor, church staff member, or lay person responsible for the ministry will review the written application and determine if the applicant will be interviewed. Indications that an interview must take place include:

* 1. There are questions raised by the individuals BCI or FBI background check.
  2. The person is a newcomer to Caldwell United Methodist Church
  3. The person wants to work alone.
  4. The person has indicated that they have been charged with a crime against children or youth. (Persons who have been previously convicted or plead guilty or no contest to a crime against children or youth will not be placed in a position involving access to children or youth.)
  5. Upon checking references, issues are raised which require clarification.

Interviews will follow the interview guidelines provided as an attachment to this policy (See Appendix C) and will be conducted by the pastor, church staff member or layperson responsible for the ministry or through the use of a designated person(s). The results of the interview, especially when sensitive areas have been discussed, should be kept confidential and only disclosed to those persons requiring this information in order to make a decision as to whether the applicant should be accepted as a volunteer.

1. Whether or not an interview is conducted, the pastor, church staff member or lay person responsible for the ministry will contact the three references provided on the application form. A written record of such contact will be retained with the application form. (See Appendix D)
2. Before beginning work with either children or youth, each volunteer will sign a statement that they have read, understand, and agree to abide by the entirety of the Church’s Child Protection Policy and Procedures. (See Appendix E)

In the unfortunate situation where it has been determined that an applicant should not work with children/youth, the church needs to handle such a decision in a confidential manner which is sensitive to that person.

**II. SUPERVISION OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

**Supervision of Classroom Activities**

**Two Adult Rule**

It is preferable that at least two adults be present for all classroom activities involving children and youth. When two adults are not available, a designated person will periodically check the rooms and be aware of the children/youth’s whereabouts if they leave the classroom area. Even when two adults are available per classroom, it is advisable to have periodic classroom checks.

While recognizing the important role of youth volunteers in children/youth ministries, in an effort to assure a safe environment, all activities involving children and youth will be supervised by at least one person who is at least 18 years of age and at least five years older than those whom they are supervising.

Any youth assisting adults with programs must be at least in the ninth grade of school.

**Open Door Policy**

Parents, volunteers, or staff of the church may visit and observe the program at any time.

**Bathroom Supervision**

Trips to the bathroom by preschoolers are to be supervised by an adult with the door held open.

**Presence of a Responsible Adult**

A responsible adult must be present (in the building) for any child under the age of 4

**Supervision of Non-Classroom Activities**

With the exception of the circumstances identified under Special Rules for Supervision of Specific Activities, the **Two Adult Rule** outlined for Classroom Activities will apply.

**Special Rules for Supervision of Specific Activities**

**Youth Counseling**

In instances of youth counseling where circumstances dictate that counseling is most effective on a one-on-one basis, a church staff person or volunteer may meet individually with a child or youth with the awareness and previous consent of that individual’s parent or legal guardian. Exceptions to consent may be made for emergencies.

**Dismissal from Group Events**

In group events, it may be inevitable that one child or youth’s transportation from the event arrives after all other children/youth’s transportation has arrived. In those circumstances, a child/youth may unavoidably be in the individual presence of an adult. Because this circumstance may be simply unavoidable, the general rule which requires the presence of two adults is suspended and the adult is responsible for exercising his/her best judgement for the child’s or youth’s well being.

**Trip and Retreat Supervision**

There shall be at least two adults present for all trips, retreats, and other times children/youth gather at or away from the church building. (Please note that at least three adults are preferable so that in the event of an emergency, there will be adequate supervision.)

There shall be at least one adult of each gender present at co-ed overnight events. At single gender overnight events, at least one of the two or more adults present will be of the same gender as the children/youth.

In situations where two adults are not available per room where children/youth are staying overnight, then no adult should stay alone in a specific room with the children/youth. In those circumstances where adults are not staying in the rooms with children/youth, special measures should be taken to assure the children/youth’s safety and supervision, such as adult hall monitors, “taping” doors, and periodic room checks by two adults of the same gender as those being checked. Parents should be made aware of housing accommodations.

Permission slips including permission for emergency medical care shall be carried by the person in charge of each trip and/or retreat. (See Appendix F)

Rules for providing transportation for church events:

* + - Driver must be known to the designated leader of the event;
    - Driver must be at least 21 years old;
    - Driver must have a valid state driver’s license for the vehicle being operated;
    - Driver must have proof of insurance;
    - Driver must be accompanied by at least two children or youth; and
    - Driver must have read and signed an acknowledgment form indicating that the policy has been read and will be followed. (See Appendix G)

**Record Retention**

All children/youth activities should have a written record of the names of participants and supervisors. Records shall be kept for three years.

**III.** **RESPONSE BY CHURCH WORKERS TO INJURIES AND ACCIDENTS**

In order to assure proper attention was given to an injury or accident, an incident report must be completed by the adult supervisor with 24 hours of the incident whenever a child/youth is injured. (See Appendix H)

**IV. RESPONSE BY CHURCH WORKERS TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE**

**Statement of Principle**

As caring Christians, we are committed to protect and advocate for children/youth participating in the life of the church. The Church is entrusted to provide an emotionally safe, spiritually grounded, healthy environment for children, youth, and adults in which they are protected from abuse.

It is our legal and moral responsibility to report suspected abuse of any at risk person, be it child or adult, whenever it comes to our attention regardless of where that abuse takes place. We shall report suspected abuse to stop potentially existing abuse and to prevent further abuse.

To report abuse is to witness to the world of the love and justice of God. Reporting abuse is a form of ministering to the needs of those crying out for help.

If abuse occurs, it is our intention to act as an advocate for all affected persons, providing support, information, assistance and intervention. We seek to provide a supportive atmosphere, offering both objectivity and empathy as we seek to create a climate in which healing can take place.

Any and all allegations of abuse or neglect are to be taken seriously. Reporting is based on suspicions that arise from the following:

* Obvious signs
* Strong suspicions of physical or emotional abuse
* Eye witness reports
* Discipline that harms
* Breaches of safety

If abuse is suspected by, observed by, or disclosed to a volunteer and/or paid staff member of the church, that person shall take the following actions.

**PROTECTING THE POTENTIALLY ABUSED OR NEGLECTED CHILD**

If the person accused is a church employee or volunteer, immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth and presumed innocence of the accused, remove the accused from further involvement with children and/or youth.

Regardless if the individual accused or suspected of abuse or neglect is or is not a church employee or volunteer, the following notification and reporting steps shall be followed.

**NOTIFICATION AND REPORTING**

**Immediately notify the proper authorities**

* **Children’s Services**
* **County Human Service exercising protective functions**
* **Local Law Enforcement**

Reporting to these organizations are a requirement of the law. (Reference section 2151.421 of The Ohio Revised Code.) Do not attempt an investigation. This should be left to professionals who are familiar with these cases. It is important to emphasize that the proper authorities must be notified even if the parent(s) does(do) not wish the incident to be reported.

* Notify the Pastor (so long as pastor is not the suspected abuser)

**Immediately after reporting to the authorities**

* Notify the parents (so long as they are not the suspected abuser). If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, contact the proper authorities. Follow their advice about notification of the parents.
* Take whatever steps are necessary and in the power of the church to assure the safety of the child/youth until the parent(s) and/or authorities arrive.
* Prepare a written report containing all initially known information. A form for this purpose is provided. (See Appendix I ) The report must be signed and dated, and each page of the report must be initialed and dated. It shall be filed in a secure place in order to ensure confidentiality.

**Also, as quickly as possible in the event that the accused abuser is a church employee or volunteer, do the following.**

* Report the incident to to the church’s attorney, the church’s insurance company.
* Report the incident to the district superintendent. The district superintendent will report the allegation to the bishop’s office. Do not try to handle this without professional assistance. If the accused is a clergy member of an annual conference, local pastor, or diaconal minister, provisions of Paragraph 358 and Paragraphs 2623-2629 of *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist* *Church* must be followed.
* Prepare a written report containing all initially known information. A form for this purpose is provided. (See Appendix I as mentioned previously) The report shall be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It shall be written in ink or typed to prevent it from being changed. The report must be signed and dated, and each page of the report must be initialed and dated. It shall be filed in a secure place in order to ensure confidentiality. The church must also file a copy of the report with the bishop’s office of the East Ohio Conference, where it shall remain confidential.
* Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the safety of the child or youth is secured, the pastor or other designated person may tell the accused that a accusation of abuse report has been made. If the accused is a volunteer or paid staff of the church, that person shall be relieved temporarily of his or her duties until the investigation is finished. If the accused is a paid staff person of the church, arrangements should be made to either maintain or suspend his or her income until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.

**COMMUNICATIONS PLAN**

Any contact with the media should be handled by a single appointed spokesman. This spokesman will be appointed by an ad-hoc committee of the Senior Pastor (as ad-hoc committee chair), the Chair of the Administrative Board, and the Chair of the Staff/Parish Relations Committee and others deemed necessary by the ad-hoc committee itself to assure a committee composition of ½ male and ½ female. The add-hoc committee shall exist until a full and final report concerning the accusation of abuse or neglect can be made to the Administrative Board.

Care will be taken to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved. The spokesperson should generally convey that the matter is under investigation and any comments made prior to the conclusion of the investigation would be premature.

Take any allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim’s family. Showing care and support help to prevent further hurt. Extend whatever pastoral resources are needed. Remember that the care and safety of the victim is the first priority. Respond in a positive and supportive manner to the alleged victim and the victim’s family. Do not attempt to force interactions with family or others.

**PROVIDING PASTORAL CARE**

Take any allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim’s family. Showing care and support help to prevent further hurt. Extend whatever pastoral resources are needed. Remember that the care and safety of the victim is the first priority and victims of abuse and their family members undergo a wide range of emotional responses to abuse. Respond in a positive and supportive manner to the alleged victim and the victim’s family. Follow the advice of professionals with experience in working with alleged victim or the family, follow legal advice, and do not force yourself on either the victim or the family.

**VI. EMPLOYEE AND VOLUNTEER TRAINING**

All staff and volunteers will receive training in all aspects of the Child Protection Policy after being approved as a volunteer or employed. All staff and volunteers will be provided with any updates on the policies as they are made and will be asked to periodically review the policies and their training.

The training may include:

* The definition and recognition of abuse.
* The church’s policies on reporting abuse and appropriate forms.
* The purposes of the policy as protection for children/youth and for church staff/ volunteer workers.
* The meaning and importance of confidentiality.
* The maintenance of a positive learning classroom environment, including appropriate discipline and age-level characteristics.
* The appropriate behavior for teachers and leaders.