



Child Abuse Prevention Policy & Procedures  
Approved August 6, 2013

Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes a child...welcomes me" (Matthew 18:5). Children are our present and our future, our hope, our teachers, and our inspiration. They are full participants in the life of the church and in the realm of God.

God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from abuse.

**I. Purpose**

- a. To help Shalimar United Methodist Church provide a caring and secure environment for children and youth in all phases of church life.
- b. To help Shalimar United Methodist Church reduce its legal risk and liability exposure.

**II. Definitions**

- a. A **Child**, for the purpose of this document, is a person less than 18 years of age. It includes both children and youth at Shalimar United Methodist Church.
- b. An **Abused Child** is defined as one who is less than 18 years of age, whose parents or other persons responsible for his/her care create or inflict, or threaten to create or inflict, or allow to be created or inflicted upon such a child a physical or mental injury by other than accidental means, or create a substantial risk of death or disfigurement, or impairment of bodily or mental functions. This includes the following: failure to provide care necessary for health, abandonment, committing or allowing sexual exploitation, endangerment or neglect. Child abuse may be physical, sexual, emotional, or mental, and may be the result of actions or the failure to act.
  - i. **Physical Abuse**  
Infliction of 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, cut, bruises, welts, abrasion, internal injuries, poisoning, sprains, dislocations, gunshot, stabbing wounds.
  - ii. **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.

iii. **Sexual Abuse**

Sexual abuse includes any act defined in the Florida Statutes and the *Book of Discipline* that is committed, or allowed to be committed, upon a child by his/her parent or other person responsible for the child's care. Examples of such abuse are: sexual exploitation, sexual molestation, intercourse/sodomy, and other sexual abuse.

iv. **Medical Neglect**

Refusal or failure by a 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.

v. **Mental Abuse/Neglect**

A pattern of acts or omissions by the caretaker that results in harm to a child's psychological or emotional health or development.

vi. **Bizarre Discipline**

Any actions in which the caretaker uses eccentric, irrational, or grossly inappropriate procedures or devices to modify the child's behavior.

c. **Approved Volunteer**

A volunteer who has completed a "Volunteer Affidavit" and has been placed on the central Approved Volunteer list

d. **Paid Staff**

Consists of all employees of Shalimar United Methodist Church

III. **Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse**

In an effort to create the safest possible environment within Shalimar United Methodist Church, several abuse prevention measures will be utilized. These measures include screening of paid and volunteer workers for past child abuse convictions or expungements, provision for regular training on child abuse issues to paid and volunteer staff members, use of the two-adult guideline standards for appropriate classroom discipline, and open classrooms. Please note that these are minimum church requirements. Individual situations and groups may have additional rules based on the situation (example: Preschool, Nursery, Youth Overnights).

a. **Pastors, Program Staff, and Volunteer Screening**

All Shalimar United Methodist Church employees and volunteers in a program involving children or youth under the age of 18, (eg. children's teachers, child care workers, preschool teachers and aides, scout and youth leaders, etc.) will be asked to sign an affidavit stating whether he/she has ever been convicted of, pleaded guilty to, pleaded nolo contendere (no contest) or had adjudication withheld for a crime constituting a felony or any act involving moral turpitude. This statement shall be part of a screening form (copy attached), which will also ask for the following: general information, criminal convictions, prior church membership, and prior church volunteer work. The Youth Director and Children's Director will maintain a list of Approved Volunteers. Where appropriate, Shalimar United Methodist Church also may require a valid state driver's license or other photographic identification to confirm identity. No one who has had a child abuse conviction or who has ever had such a conviction

expunged, or who refuses to complete this screening form, will be permitted to work with children or youth at Shalimar United Methodist Church.

In addition to the screening process described above, every person hired for a Paid Staff position shall first have undergone a criminal history background check, the cost of which shall be borne by Shalimar United Methodist Church. All completed screening forms and criminal record checks shall be maintained in a locked and secured file drawer under the joint direction and control of the church administrator and the church accountant. The records for those working in the preschool shall be maintained and stored by the preschool in keeping with state regulations.

**b. Training**

All persons employed by Shalimar United Methodist Church and all Approved Volunteers will be required to read Shalimar United Methodist Church's Child Abuse Prevention Policy and sign a notarized affidavit indicating that they have read and understand the policy and agree to abide by it. This affidavit shall be part of the screening form (See Above). Anyone failing to sign this statement will be contacted. If the teacher or worker does not sign the statement after being contacted, that person will not be permitted to serve until the policy has been read and the form signed. Such persons also will be required to attend one training session related to the church's abuse policy during the course of their first year of service following the adoption of this policy. These training sessions will be offered by the church, conducted by clergy or Paid Staff Members, and held at various times throughout the year.

A representative of each Girl Scout and Boy Scout troop sponsored by the Shalimar United Methodist Church will be required to read the policy and sign the acknowledgement form. These representatives will be responsible to see that the policies are followed by the troop and adult troop leaders.

**c. Two Adult Guideline**

Whenever possible, teachers will be assigned in teams of two or more per Sunday school hour to every class of children or youth. Concerted effort will be made to recruit sufficient numbers of volunteer teachers to permit such team teaching. In certain situations a roving person who is free to enter and exit the classrooms at will, may serve as the second person. If an adult needs to leave a class or activity with a child, that person shall inform another adult or nearby teacher. Other church-sponsored or community groups of children or youth who meet at the church should have two or more leaders present whenever possible. If the group stays overnight at the church, or if a church-sponsored group leaves the premises, two or more leaders must be present and should include at least one male and one female, if the group is mixed gender.

**d. Classroom Discipline**

All teachers and workers will use the following discipline measures. 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 what the expected behavior is, e.g., "We do not throw the blocks, we use blocks for building." If this measure is not effective, the child will be guided to another activity. If

inappropriate behavior continues, the child may be placed at a table to work alone away from the other students. If the child's disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, the child may be taken to the Youth Director or Children's Director and left under such person's supervision. NO physical punishment or verbal abuse, eg. ridicule, is to be used at any time. If isolating the child within the classroom or removal of the child from the room becomes necessary, the situation will be discussed with the child's parents or guardian as soon as possible.

**e. Open Classroom**

Classrooms or child care rooms may be visited without prior notice by church staff, parents, or other volunteer church workers. Windows on the classroom door should never be obstructed. Brief observations of child care rooms and classrooms of children or youth may be conducted by the Children's Director, Youth Director, Program Director, or Pastor during Sunday school hours.

**f. Age Restriction for volunteers**

Youth, under the age of 18, working in children's programs will be under adult supervision.

**IV. Reporting Child Abuse**

Any and every allegation of child abuse will be treated seriously. Should there be an allegation of child abuse occurring at SUMC or at church-sponsored activities, the matter should be reported immediately to the Chair of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee and the pastor in charge (unless the allegation involves a clergy person, in which case the matter should also be reported to the District Superintendent or the presiding Bishop). Together, these individuals shall ensure that an appropriate investigation is commenced and that the following procedures are followed.

- a. Pray for the church and all persons affected by the allegation.
- b. Immediately begin documenting all procedures observed in the handling of the allegation. Use documentation form (in church office).
- c. Immediately notify the Florida Department of Children and Families (1-800-962-2873) of the allegation. It is advisable to have the complainant present with the reported at this time.
- d. Immediately notify the parents. A member of the investigation team should have first hand knowledge that the parents are aware of this issue.
- e. Immediately notify the District Superintendent.
- f. If the accused has assigned duties within the life of the church, that person must be temporarily relieved of his/her duties until the investigation is concluded. Pay will be determined by the Staff-Parish Relations Committee.
- g. 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.
- h. Observe confidentiality for both the alleged victim and the accused.
- i. If the media is involved, the church administrator will be the person in charge of media communication.