

God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults grow safe and strong. Therefore, in covenant with other United Methodist congregations and the Alabama-West Florida Conference of The United Methodist Church, Fairhope United Methodist Church adopts this Safe Sanctuaries Policy to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all children, youth and vulnerable adults. Staff members and volunteers alike are expected to uphold this policy as a minimum standard in establishing safe sanctuaries for all God's children.

## Definitions

For the purpose of our Safe Sanctuaries Policy, the following terms will be used:

**Children** are those from birth to the completion of 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

**Youth** are those in 7<sup>th</sup> grade through graduation of high school.

**Vulnerable adults** are those with physical, mental and/or developmental impairment or disability.

**Adult** status in Alabama is attained at age 19.

**Activity** includes all church programming for children, youth and vulnerable adults.

**Authority Figure** is a person who is the primary leader of any children, youth or vulnerable adult activity. This person must be at least 21 years of age.

**Assistant** is a person who gives help to and is directed by an authority figure during an activity. This person must be at least 12 years of age. However, in order to satisfy the "Two Adult" rule this person must be at least 19 years of age.

**Floater** is an adult who acts as an assistant to an authority figure to monitor activities in order to comply with the "Two Adult" rule. Example: when two non-related adults is not feasible.

## Policies

**"Two Adult" Rule:** There shall be at least two adults – 19 years or older, preferably unrelated - present for all activities involving children, youth and vulnerable adults. When it is impossible to have two adults (non-related), there must be an additional adult serving as a floater with visual and physical access to all areas. This means an open door or door with a window that provides the floater to fully see into the room or building or outside space.

**Background checks** are required for all paid staff, volunteers and anyone who has unrestricted access to children, youth and vulnerable adults. Motor vehicle records are to be checked as well for those who transport children, youth and vulnerable adults. Background checks are required every 5 years unless the individual has been absent for 12 months or longer. The results of these checks will be kept confidential.

**Qualifications for Serving:** All volunteers wanting to serve as an authority figure with children, youth or vulnerable adults must demonstrate an active relationship with the church (membership, regular attendance or known affiliation) for a minimum of 6

months. Those who have been active less than 6 months may serve as assistants. Those wanting to serve must also be competent to work effectively in the served activity.

**"Four Years Older" Rule:** For children and youth, it is recommended that authority figures and assistants are at least four years older than the oldest children or youth in the activity.

**Appropriate:** Authority figures and assistants must be attentive to appropriate attire, appropriate use of language and appropriate demonstrations of affection and encouragement.

**No adult should ever be alone with a child, youth or vulnerable adult in a room, especially one with a closed door.** This includes a bathroom. In an instance where bathroom assistance is required, another adult should be present, or at the very minimum, the main door to the bathroom should be left open. At any counseling session with children, youth or vulnerable adults, it is recommended that the "Two Adult" rule be followed. If this is not feasible, either the door of the room will remain open or the window in the door will remain unobstructed for the entire session.

**Sign-In Procedures** will be in place for all activities with children (this can include parent sign-in or an authority figure recording attendance). When possible, sign-out procedures will also be utilized.

**Transportation:** All persons transporting children, youth and vulnerable adults should be 19 years of age or older. Where possible, the "Two Adult" rule should be followed in each vehicle. Two adults are not required, however, to occupy each vehicle in a caravan.

## Discipline

Children's Ministries will adhere to the following discipline plan: Children will receive two verbal warnings for misbehavior. No language will be allowed that makes the child feel unworthy, unloved or not cared for.

After two verbal warnings the child may be removed from the activity until he/she seems ready to re-enter the activity.

For ongoing behavioral problems, parents will be notified and invited to help design an appropriate behavior management plan.

Positive reinforcement will always be encouraged as a management technique. NO physical discipline is allowed except for restraint when absolutely necessary.

## Reporting Abuse

If a volunteer witnesses any incident with a child, youth or vulnerable adult that they find inappropriate or abusive, they should immediately notify a pastor or the staff member in charge. For imminent situations, call 911!

If a volunteer is suspicious that a child, youth or vulnerable adult has been abused or neglected outside the church setting, they should notify a pastor or staff member.

If a volunteer witnesses an accident where a child, youth or vulnerable adult is injured, they should notify the staff member in charge immediately. For imminent situations, call 911!

**Overnight Events** can include retreats, camps, mission trips and lock-ins. In overnight situations, the adult staying in a room with children or youth must be of the same gender and they must never share a bed. Such adults should not be alone with children or youth at any time.

If an immediate family member or guardian of a child or youth is chaperoning an overnight event, they are permitted to share a room and bed with his or her child/youth no matter the gender as long as no other young people are sharing the room.

**The following are suggested ratios provided by the Alabama/West Florida Conference.** This is a standard for which we will strive to meet AFTER we meet our "Two Adult" rule.

0 up to 18 months	1 to 3
18 months up to 2 ½ years	1 to 5
24 months up to 36 months	1 to 6
2 ½ years up to 4 years	1 to 6
4 years up to school age	1 to 7
School age up to 8 years	1 to 10
8 years and older	1 to 12

A signed and notarized **Emergency Release Form** will be required for all children and youth participating in activities. Children's forms are done annually in June before Vacation Bible School. Youth forms, after being submitted the first time, are updated annually as needed. Each form includes a photo release statement that needs to be signed. These forms are kept in the church office.

No child will be released to anyone other than the persons listed on the Emergency Release Form except for when special arrangements have been made by the parent/guardian. Satisfactory identification will be requested when the person picking up the child is not known by the staff person in charge or the authority figure.



## FAIRHOPE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



## SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH AND VULNERABLE ADULTS

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