

Oak Grove  
United Methodist Church  
**Safe Sanctuaries**



A Risk Reduction and  
Abuse Prevention Policy For  
Children, Youth, and Adults

Contents:

- † Guidelines for Safe Ministry
- † What if a child talks to you about being abused?
- † What if a parent talks to you about an alleged abusive situation?
- † People to Contact at Oak Grove UMC
- † What to do with a case of abuse
- † Policies for responding to allegations of abuse
- † Steps for Communication

## **INTRODUCTION**

This manual is the Oak Grove United Methodist Church Risk Reduction Policy statement for the prevention of abuse and the handling of reports, especially where children are concerned. These procedures are intended to protect all persons who enter the community be they children, youth, parents, volunteers, visitors, or staff.

As a congregation we must acknowledge and learn risk behaviors and their prevention. We must insure that policies and procedures are in place to prevent harm to anyone. We continue to encourage all persons to answer the call to be in ministry, both children and adults, and make a positive difference in their lives.

We recognize that child and elder abuse occurs every minute of the day, in every community, in every economic, racial, religious, and demographic group. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to be vigilant and knowledgeable in protecting all persons in our midst and in preventing abuse in all its forms in the community.

## **BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

The United Methodist Church affirms the sacredness of all persons and their rights to safety, nurture, and care. It names domestic violence and sexual abuse as sins and pledges to work for their eradication. The Church commits itself to listen to the stories of battered spouses, rape victims, abused children, adult survivors of sexual abuse, and all others who are violated and victimized. The Church further commits itself to provide leadership in responding with justice and compassion to the presence of domestic violence and sexual abuse among its membership and within the community at large.

- Book of Resolutions, 2004, page 470

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, exploitations, and ritual abuse occur in churches large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural, and racial lines. It is real, and it appears to be increasing. Most annual conferences can cite specific incidents of child sexual abuse and exploitation within churches. Virtually every congregation has adult survivors of early sexual trauma among its members.

Such incidents are devastating to all who are involved: the child, the family, the local church, and its leaders. Increasingly, churches are torn apart by the legal, emotional, and monetary consequences of litigation following allegations of abuse.

God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from sexual and ritual abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults grow safe and strong. In response to this church-wide challenge, steps should be taken to reduce the rise of child sexual abuse.

- Book of Resolutions, 2004, pages 201-202

## **GUIDELINES FOR SAFE MINISTRY WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

### **TWO ADULT RULE**

When possible, two adults are required to be present at all times during any church sponsored program, event, or ministry involving children. The risk is reduced even more if the two adults are not related. If only one adult is present, the open door policy may be enforced. It is a known fact that abusers thrive on secrecy, isolation, and their ability to manipulate victims. When abusers know they will never have a chance to be alone with potential victims, they quickly lose interest in “working” with children.

### **FIRST AID & CPR**

Ministry with children, youth, and older adults inevitably involves activities that can result in bumps, bruises, scrapes, and serious injuries. Those working with children and youth should be provided this training as a step toward assuring parents and giving them confidence that Oak Grove is a safe place for their children.

### **ANNUAL ORIENTATION FOR VOLUNTEERS AND STAFF**

All volunteers and workers with children, youth, and adults, whether clergy or lay, shall attend an orientation session in which they are informed of the:

- church’s policies for the prevention of abuse
- policies and procedures to be used in all ministries in the church
- appropriate steps for reporting an incident of abuse
- details of the state laws regarding abuse

### **OPEN DOOR POLICY**

In all activities with children where only one adult is present, the door of the room being used should remain open for the entire session. Extenuating circumstances include: wintertime, when it is necessary for the room to remain warm, or the noise level of the activities requires the door to be closed. It is recommended that two or more adults be present if the door must be closed. If it is safer to have the door locked on the inside, this should be done. Counseling sessions are to be entered into with caution. Preferably, in cases where there is an element of risk, sessions should be conducted in a room where confidentiality can be maintained but neither the counselor nor the client is at risk.

### **WINDOWS IN ALL CLASSROOM DOORS**

Each room set aside for children and youth should have a door with a window in it or a half door. A half door offers protection against children wandering outside the classroom and allows for full visual access. At no time should the window be covered to prevent visual checks of the room.

### **FIVE YEARS OLDER RULE**

Volunteers or paid staff hired to work with senior high school level youth should be at least five years older than the youth with whom they will be working, and should be qualified either through education or life experiences.

## **WORKERS UNDER AGE EIGHTEEN**

While it is preferable to have all workers and volunteers over age eighteen, there are those youth who have shown maturity and wisdom in working with children. To reduce risks, it is recommended that these youth who volunteer to work with children be required to take a Red Cross course in infant/child care and CPR. There should be an adult who can provide periodic supervision.

## **BUDDY SYSTEM**

If children need to leave the room for any reason during the session, children under age ten should not be allowed to leave alone.

## **ADVANCE NOTICE TO PARENTS**

Parent(s) shall be given advance notice and full information regarding any event in which their children will be participating. Included in this information will be the anticipated ratio of adults to children. Before the event, the parent(s) may be required to give written permission for their child's participation.

## **PARENT AND FAMILY EDUCATION**

A family education event should be held periodically, in which information will be shared regarding the latest finding in child/youth sexual abuse and the current policies and procedures of Oak Grove UMC. An event of this type could include, but not be limited to:

- a speaker from local law enforcement
- a speaker from the local child protective services agency
- a doctor or counselor experienced in treating abused children
- an attorney
- videos about child sexual abuse
- printed information about Oregon's abuse statutes and abuse requirements
- printed copies of Oak Grove UMC abuse prevention policies and procedures
- a time for worship and prayer

## **APPROPRIATE EQUIPMENT & SUPERVISION**

Periodic inspection, at least annually, of all equipment shall be done to prevent injuries to children, youth, and adults. This should include all furniture, toys, and other furnishings in Sunday School rooms. Locks on windows and doors should be examined for safety. Periodic training of all volunteers including persons such as ushers, greeters, and teachers shall include basic first aid, and policies and procedures of Oak Grove UMC.

## **ADEQUATE INSURANCE FOR THE SCOPE OF MINISTRIES**

The Board of Trustees should carefully review all ministries in the church and work with the insurance agents, fire department inspectors, and health department inspectors to provide maximum protection and coverage for all persons and activities.

## WHAT IF A CHILD\* TALKS TO YOU ABOUT BEING ABUSED?

- If it is happening at the time you learn about the abuse, **stop it immediately**, and remove the victim to a safer location.
- Guard your reaction and do your best not to be shocked or over-react.
- Children are rarely able to lie about abuse. Believe them when they report to you. The child protective agency will sort out those issues.
- Commend the child for talking to you and support them with your care and concern. Children frequently blame themselves for the abuse. Reassure them that they are not to blame and it is not their fault.
- Don't ask the child for all the details. They will have to tell their story in full detail to the police or other agency. Protecting them from multiple interviews is important. Let them share what they are comfortable with. Be a good listener. DO NOT "help the child tell their story."
- Explain to them what you are going to do in words they can understand.
- DO NOT promise a child that you will not tell anyone.
- Report the suspected abuse as directed in the church Safety Plan. The person hearing the child first is the person who should make the report. If the child is going to return to a home where the abuse occurred and is at risk, call the police or child protection agency immediately. Clackamas County: **971-673-7112**
- Write down, as soon as possible, what you heard and to whom it was reported. If more than one person heard the child's story, each person must write his or her own account separately without consulting the other witness. Date and time stamp all reports. Keep a copy for yourself in case you need to reference the information at a later date for clarification or if you are called to testify in court.
- Maintain confidentiality.

\* May substitute Youth, Adult, or Elder for "Child".

## WHAT IF A PARENT\* TALKS TO YOU ABOUT AN ALLEGED ABUSIVE SITUATION?

- Guide the parent through the information outlined in this policy. Guard your reactions and do your best not to over-react and be judgmental. Help them understand that even though reporting is difficult, it is the beginning of the healing process for the family. Encourage them to talk to someone they know and trust or obtain a referral to a qualified counselor.
- Offer to support them while they file the report. If possible, go with them to the police station or other agency and be as supportive as possible.
- The mandatory reporting number in Clackamas County is: **971-673-7112**.
- After hours, the Tri-County Abuse Hotline is: **503-731-3100**
- If you think it would be helpful, follow-up the next day with a call of your support.
- If the parent(s) decide NOT to report, gently remind them of your own responsibility to report. Be prepared for their anger, hostility, and threats.
- Document your interactions with the person reporting the alleged abuse as soon as possible.
- Maintain confidentiality.

\* May substitute Caregiver, Legal Guardian, Foster Parent, Church Youth Worker, or Volunteer, for "Parent".

**PERSONS AT OAK GROVE UMC TO BE CONTACTED  
IN CASE OF SUSPECTED ABUSE  
(2016-17)**

**PASTOR** Pastor Heather Riggs  
Church Office: 503-654-3161  
Cell: 360-913-1304

**CHURCH COUNCIL** Jean Fairbairn/Buildings & Grounds: 503-656-3688  
Gregg Mitchell/Personnel: 503-305-6987  
Debra Payne/Policies: 503-320-0692

**EDUCATION** Lacey Vogel  
503-698-7414

**DISTRICT** Rev. Erin Martin  
**SUPERINTENDENT** 503-249-1851

## **POLICIES FOR RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE**

All reports will be forwarded to the Metro District Superintendent of the United Methodist Church. Anyone making a report will be protected per ORS419B.25. That person will remain anonymous, unless required to testify. An adult victim has three years to report abuse and take action.

### **RESPONDING TO A REPORT OF ABUSE:**

All members (staff and volunteers) shall know how to respond to:

- others regarding the allegations
- the victim and their family
- the news media - ONE PERSON IS TO BE DESIGNATED AS SPOKESPERSON, A SECOND AS ALTERNATE.
- the church's insurance agent
- the District Superintendent and/or Bishop
- the abuser and their family
- and avoid speculation and gossip

A written prepared statement shall include:

- a completed incident report form,
- the church's policy for child abuse,
- the concern for the safety of the victim, their family and all persons involved, and
- the policies and procedures that have been followed.

## STEPS FOR COMMUNICATION

### The first step:

The first step in communication is with victims of abuse. This step may begin with an open letter to all church members. At no time, should the letter include the identification of the victim, the accused, or the accuser.

### Congregational meeting:

A notification letter detailing a congregational meeting should include the specific time and place of a meeting to be set by the Pastor and to be held within five working days of the report. The church mailing list will be used. The DS will be notified of this meeting and be invited to attend. The congregational meeting shall not be announced at the general morning worship.

### Meeting agenda:

A designated spokesperson will be named and open the meeting. A legal or police spokesperson will officiate during the meeting. The meeting and all of the discussion will be kept in strict confidence by all attending.

### Response to annual conference and insurance agent:

Conference authorities, either DS and/or the Bishop, shall be notified as soon as allegations of abuse are received. The conference authorities must be kept aware of the congregation's actions throughout the process.

### Response to the News Media:

No one but the designated spokesperson should be authorized to speak to the media on behalf of the congregation.

### Response to the accused:

The alleged abuser will be removed from his/her position as a volunteer worker with children, youth, or adults until all allegations are fully investigated and resolved.

### Continuing the ministry:

It may be necessary to provide support ministries within the congregation. The support may include:

- individual counseling for the victim and their family
- counseling for affected members of the congregation
- counseling for the abuser's family
- a special service of worship and healing may be created as part of the follow-up to the resolution of the incident

### Initial steps for new employees:

At the time of hiring, the respective SPRC liaison will ensure that the new employee has received a copy of this policy. The liaison will contact the new employee within ten days to confirm that they have read the policy.