

**WESTOVER HILLS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
CHILD PROTECTION POLICY  
AND PROCEDURES**

**I. Our Mission**

Westover Hills United Methodist Church strives to provide a safe environment in which each young person can grow as a disciple of Christ.

**II. Purpose**

Westover Hills United Methodist Church seeks to establish reasonable procedures to reduce the risk of physical, emotional and sexual abuse of children as they participate in church ministries and to protect staff and volunteers from false allegations of misconduct.

**III. Biblical Foundation**

Westover Hills United Methodist Church seeks to express God's love of young persons and to provide for their personal wholeness. This faith community seeks to provide an environment that is caring and secure for all persons. 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.

**IV. Commonwealth of Virginia Statutes**

Under Section 63.2-100 of the Code of Virginia, an abused child is defined as one who is less than eighteen years of age,

1 Whose parents or other person responsible for his care creates or inflicts, threatens to create or inflict, or allows to be created or inflicted upon such child a physical or mental injury by other than accidental means, or creates a substantial risk of death, disfigurement, or impairment of bodily or mental functions, including, but not limited to, a child who is with his parent or other person responsible for his care either (i) during the manufacture or attempted manufacture of a Schedule I or II controlled substance, or (ii) during the unlawful sale of such substance by that child's parents or other person responsible for his care, where such manufacture, or

attempted manufacture or unlawful sale would constitute a felony violation of § [18.2-248](#);

2. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care neglects or refuses to provide care necessary for his health. However, no child who in good faith is under treatment solely by spiritual means through prayer in accordance with the tenets and practices of a recognized church or religious denomination shall for that reason alone be considered to be an abused or neglected child. Further, a decision by parents who have legal authority for the child or, in the absence of parents with legal authority for the child, any person with legal authority for the child, who refuses a particular medical treatment for a child with a life-threatening condition shall not be deemed a refusal to provide necessary care if (i) such decision is made jointly by the parents or other person with legal authority and the child; (ii) the child has reached 14 years of age and is sufficiently mature to have an informed opinion on the subject of his medical treatment; (iii) the parents or other person with legal authority and the child have considered alternative treatment options; and (iv) the parents or other person with legal authority and the child believe in good faith that such decision is in the child's best interest. Nothing in this subdivision shall be construed to limit the provisions of § [16.1-278.4](#);
3. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care abandons such child;
4. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care commits or allows to be committed any act of sexual exploitation or any sexual act upon a child in violation of the law;
5. Who is without parental care or guardianship caused by the unreasonable absence or the mental or physical incapacity of the child's parent, guardian, legal custodian or other person standing in loco parentis;
6. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care creates a substantial risk of physical or mental injury by knowingly leaving the child alone in the same dwelling, including an apartment as defined in § [55-79.2](#), with a person to whom the child is not related by blood or marriage and who the parent or other person responsible for his care knows has been convicted of an offense against a minor for which registration is required as a violent sexual offender pursuant to § [9.1-902](#); or
7. Who has been identified as a victim of sex trafficking or severe forms of trafficking as defined in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, 22 U.S.C § 7102 et seq., and in the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act of 2015, 42 U.S.C. § 5101 et seq.

An act of child abuse may be committed by any person responsible for the care of another individual who is less than eighteen years of age. It does not matter whether the person caring for the child under the age of 18 (hereinafter referred to as a "Child" or "Children", which term as used in this Policy also includes youth ages 12-18) is a compensated or a volunteer worker. It does not matter whether the person routinely is entrusted with the care of children or whether such individual only occasionally comes in contact with children. It does not matter whether the person was entrusted with the care of a child for an hour or only a moment. It only matters that a child was abused or neglected by the person who, on the occasion in question, was responsible for the child's care.

## **V. Types of Child Abuse**

### **Definition**

Child abuse refers to an act committed by a parent, care giver 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 explanations in this section are from the Virginia Department of Social Services.

### **Types of Abuse**

#### **1. Physical Abuse**

Physical abuse occurs when a caretaker creates or inflicts, threatens to create or inflict, or allows to be created or inflicted upon a child a physical injury by other than accidental means or creates a substantial risk of death, disfigurement, or impairment of bodily functions, including, but not limited to, a child who is with his parent or other person responsible for his care either (i) during the manufacture or attempted manufacture of a Schedule I or II controlled substance or (ii) during the unlawful sale of such substance by that child's parents or other person responsible for his care, where such manufacture, or attempted manufacture or unlawful sale would constitute a felony violation of § 18.2-248 of the Code of Virginia.

#### **2. Physical Neglect**

Physical neglect occurs when there is the failure to provide food, clothing, shelter, or supervision for a child to the extent that the child's health or safety is endangered. The types of physical neglect include but are not limited to: abandonment, inadequate supervision, inadequate clothing, inadequate shelter, inadequate personal hygiene, inadequate food, malnutrition, knowingly leaving a child with a person required to register as violent sex offender, failure to thrive, other physical neglect, family poverty and lack of resources, .

#### **3. Sexual Abuse**

Sexual abuse occurs when there is any act of sexual exploitation or any sexual act upon a child in violation of the law which is committed or allowed to be committed by the child's parents or other persons responsible for the care of the child pursuant to § 63.2-100 of the Code of Virginia. The types of sexual abuse include but are not limited to: Sexual exploitation, Other sexual abuse, Sexual molestation, Intercourse and sodomy.

#### **4. Medical Neglect**

Medical neglect occurs when there is the failure by the 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 pursuant to § 63.2-100 of the Code of Virginia.

#### **5. Mental Abuse/Neglect**

Mental abuse or neglect occurs when a caretaker creates or inflicts, threatens to create or inflict, or allows to be created or inflicted upon such child a mental injury by other than accidental means or creates a substantial risk of impairment of mental functions.

## **VI. Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse**

In an effort to create the safest possible environment within Westover Hills United Methodist Church, several abuse prevention measures will be utilized. These measures include screening of paid and certain 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 rule, standards of appropriate classroom discipline and open classrooms.

### **1. Staff Screening**

Before beginning the first year of service, each employee or volunteer for children or youth ministries, children or youth teacher, child care worker, or youth worker will be asked to sign a statement indicating that he/she has never been convicted of child abuse nor had such a conviction expunged. Also, the screening form will ask for the following: general information, criminal convictions, prior church membership, prior church volunteer work, and prior experience with children or youth. Anyone who has had a child abuse conviction or expungement, as well as anyone refusing to sign the statement, will not be permitted to work with children or youth.

Each paid staff person and each person determined to be a volunteer "leader" working with children or youth, and each volunteer assisting with the nursery ministry shall also undergo a national criminal and sex offender background check and a Central Registry check. The church will cover the cost of these checks. Each paid staff person and each person determined to be a volunteer "leader" working with children or youth, and each volunteer assisting with the nursery ministry shall also undergo a multi-state criminal record check every five years thereafter. The church will cover the cost of this check. The staff member responsible for the ministry for which a volunteer is working will review the criminal record check and screening form to determine suitability of utilizing that person to work with children and/or youth. Within three months of the adoption of this policy, all existing leaders and workers with children and youth will comply with this paragraph in order to continue in their positions. The Chair of the Child Protection Committee will maintain these records in a safe and confidential file at Westover Hills United Methodist Church.

### **2. Staff Training**

Before beginning their first year of service, and annually thereafter, all paid staff and volunteer leaders, child care workers, children and youth Sunday School teachers and youth workers will be required to read the church's child protection policy and sign a form indicating that they have read and that they understand the policy and agree to abide by it. Anyone failing to do so will not be permitted to serve until the policy has been read and the form signed. Leaders will be required to attend a training session offered by the church annually on child protection or to sign a statement indicating completion of an on-line training designated by the Child Protection Committee. Other workers with children and youth will be encouraged to attend such training sessions or to complete such on-line training.

Leaders of community groups of children or youth who use the church facility, including its outdoor facilities, are required to read the policy and sign the acknowledgment form. Church facilities, including outdoor facilities, will not be available to groups whose leaders refuse to

read and sign the policy. Groups that use the church facility who have their own child protection policy shall submit a copy of this policy to the Church Administrative Assistant. The chair of the Child Protection Committee shall review the policy to determine if it meets acceptable criteria. If it does meet acceptable criteria, the group may follow the guidelines of their own child protection policy. Because the playground is a public access playground, outside groups that use the church's playground without contracting to do so will not be required to comply with the child protection policy. However, Westover Hills United Methodist Church reserves the right to bar any outside group or individual from use of the playground or other access to church property for conduct or activities that may constitute child abuse as defined in Section V and to report such conduct or activities as provided in Section VII

### **3. Two Adult Rule**

Leaders will be assigned in teams of two or more for all children or youth activities. These two leaders will be unrelated adults age 18 or older and at least 5 years older than the children and youth they are with. If the group is divided, each subgroup will have two leaders. If there are not two leaders available for each group, then either the group will be combined with another group to make possible the presence of two leaders or the activity will be canceled on that occasion. However, Sunday School classes and children's church may be taught by one teacher who has completed a criminal background check providing that the door to the classroom is kept open at all times and provided that another adult is present on the same floor of the building and is checking on the class periodically. Community groups of children or youth who meet at the church must have two or more leaders present who have signed this form, except as noted in VI. 2. above. If any group stays overnight at the church, or if a church sponsored group leaves the premises, two or more leaders must be present. In the case of overnight stays, there must be at least one male and one female present, not related by marriage, if the group spending the night at a church facility or on an overnight church outing is mixed in gender.

### **4. Adequate Supervision**

Adequate supervision will be provided at all times:

- One adult to three children, zero to twelve months of age.
- One adult to four children, ages twelve to twenty-four months
- One adult to six children, ages twenty-four months to thirty-six months
- One adult to eight children, ages three to eighteen years

The specific needs of individual children may require a change to these guidelines.

### **5. One-on-One Mentoring or Consultation**

Any one-on-one mentoring or consultation between an adult and a child will be conducted in a room or area that is in plain view of others.

### **6. Classroom Discipline**

All leaders and workers with children and youth will use the following discipline measures. If a child is behaving inappropriately, the leader 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 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 children. If the child's disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, the child will be taken to the parent. If the parents are not accessible, the child may be taken to a staff person or the supervising adult for the activity and left under his or her supervision. At no time will the child be alone in the care of a single adult. No physical punishment or verbal abuse, e.g., ridicule, are 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.

### **7. Open Classrooms**

Classrooms or child care rooms may be visited without prior notice by church staff, parents, or other volunteer church workers, e.g., Sunday School Superintendent, at any time. Brief observations of child care rooms and classrooms of children or youth are conducted by the pastor or the primary leader during all activities.

### **8. Adequate Supervision and Release of Children**

Supervision by Westover Hills United Methodist Church staff and volunteers will be provided during an event or activity sponsored by Westover Hills United Methodist Church. Supervision will be provided following an event or activity sponsored by Westover Hills United Methodist Church until all children are in the care and custody of a parent, legal guardian or other designated individual. No child will be knowingly permitted to walk home from a Westover Hills United Methodist Church sponsored activity or event, regardless of age, unless a parent, legal guardian or other designated individual has provided written permission to Westover Hills United Methodist Church to allow the child to walk home following the particular event. No child will be released to anyone other than the parent or legal guardian unless prior written permission has been granted to Westover Hills United Methodist Church by the parent or legal guardian. Reasonable measures will be taken to prevent a child from leaving a Westover Hills United Methodist Church sponsored activity unaccompanied by a parent, legal guardian, or other designated individual until the activity's conclusion unless prior arrangements are made with Westover Hills United Methodist Church by the parent or legal guardian. All notices required by this policy will be provided to the Westover Hills United Methodist Church staff member or adult volunteer who is responsible for the administration and coordination of the activity or event in which the child is participating.

### **9. Child Protection Committee**

The Charge Conference, upon nomination by the Nominations & Personnel Committee, shall annually elect a Child Protection Committee. The membership of the Child Protection Committee shall include the pastor, the chair of Staff Parrish Relations Committee and not less than two nor more than four members of the church. Unless otherwise designated by the Charge Conference, the Staff Parrish Relations Chair shall serve as the chairperson of the Child Protection Committee. The Child Protection Committee shall annually review and propose any revisions to this Policy, and shall be responsible for the administration and interpretations of this Policy.

### **10. Availability of Policy**

A copy of this policy will be made available upon request to any church member or parent/guardian of any child attending any event or activity at Westover Hills United Methodist Church. Additionally, the policy will be available on the church's website.

## VII. Reporting Child Abuse

Should there be an allegation of child abuse at Westover Hills United Methodist Church; the following procedures shall be followed:

1. Any allegation of child abuse shall be treated seriously.
2. Pray for the church and all persons affected by the allegation.
3. Immediately begin documenting all procedures which occur in handling the allegation.
4. Immediately notify the pastor and/or a member of the Child Protection Committee of the substance of the allegations, unless the allegations involve the pastor. The person notified shall immediately contact the pastor and/or other members of the Committee. As many members of the Committee as are immediately accessible shall be convened either in person or by telephone and the allegations shall be evaluated initially to determine whether there is a reason to suspect that child abuse may have occurred. The function of the Committee at this stage is not to conduct an investigation, but to determine, based upon the allegations and the information then in the possession of the Committee, whether a reason to suspect exists. In making such a determination, the Committee shall avail itself of such counsel as it deems necessary and as is immediately available, including, but not limited to, consultation with an attorney, with a representative of the church's insurance company, with the district superintendent, and anonymously with the Virginia Department of Social Services.
  - a. If the allegations involve the pastor, the Chairperson of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee shall be notified immediately and he or she shall immediately notify the district superintendent who shall direct the next steps taken by the church in responding to the allegations. The provisions of this Policy shall continue to apply except as the district superintendent directs that other steps be taken.
5. If the Child Protection Committee determines that there is a reason to suspect that child abuse may have occurred, then the following steps shall be taken by the pastor, Chairperson of the Child Protection Committee, or Chairperson of the Staff-Parrish Relations Committee:
  - a. Immediately notify the Virginia Department of Social Services of the allegation.
  - b. Immediately notify the parents if it is not known that they have previous knowledge.
  - c. Immediately notify the church's insurance company.
  - d. Immediately notify the district superintendent.
6. Do not confront the accused with the allegation. If the accused has assigned duties within the life of the church and the Child Protection Committee determines that the steps outlined in paragraph VI (5) above are appropriate, that person must be temporarily relieved of their duties until the investigation is concluded.

7. The pastor should extend whatever care and resources are necessary to those impacted by the allegation, 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 of the truth or falsity of the allegation which could contaminate the investigation. Do not assign blame or take any steps that involve establishing or refuting the allegation.

8. 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.

9. Observe confidentiality for both the alleged victim and the accused until advised to the contrary by the Child Protection Committee.

10. There shall be a single spokesperson for the Church who shall be designated by the Child Protection Committee.

### **VIII. Policy Review**

As noted in in VI. 9. Above The Child Protection Policy and Procedures of Westover Hills United Methodist Church shall be reviewed annually by the Child Protection Committee. The policy shall then be approved by the Administrative Council. A verification follow-up report will be made each year at Charge Conference to ensure the integrity of the policy and procedures.

After reviewing the foregoing Policy and Procedures, please sign, date, detach and return this page to indicate that you have read, understood and accept the Child Protection Policy and Procedures of Westover Hills United Methodist Church.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

I have read and understand the Child Protection Policy and Procedures of Westover Hills United Methodist Church. I agree to abide by those policies and procedures. I have no convictions for child abuse or expungements of such convictions. I authorize and release any references or churches which I might provide to Westover Hills United Methodist Church to provide the Church any information (including opinions) that they may have regarding my work with children and/or youth.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature

Date