

# **Safe Sanctuary:**

## **Children and Youth Abuse Prevention Policy**



### **Zion Church**

*A United Methodist Congregation  
In York, PA*

#### **Introduction**

Jesus said, “Whoever welcomes a child... welcomes me.” (Matthew 18:5) Children and youth are full participants in the congregational life of Zion Church. God calls us to make Zion Church a safe place where children and youth are protected from abuse of all kinds. Therefore, in covenant as God’s people, Zion Church adopts this policy for the prevention of abuse. This policy covers activities and programs where Zion Staff and Servant-Volunteers are in responsible charge of children and youth.

#### **Purpose**

Zion Church establishes this “Children and Youth Abuse Prevention Policy” and its related documents and procedures to demonstrate and to implement our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical and emotional safety and spiritual growth of children and youth within the ministries of Zion Church.

#### **Statement of Covenant**

We will be examples of Jesus Christ and do ministry in His name in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of the children and youth as well as all the Servant-Volunteers who participate in the ministries of Zion Church. We will follow reasonable safety measures in all our ministries and events. We will educate and train all of our Servant-Volunteers who work with children and youth regarding the use of appropriate policies and methods of teaching and leading—including first aid and discipline measures. We will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting any suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. We will be prepared to respond to the needs of any victim and his/her family and the congregation if an incident occurs.

#### **Conclusion**

In all of our ministries with children and youth, Zion Church is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ and the true principles of Christian faith within our United Methodist tradition, so that every child and youth will be “surrounded by steadfast love, established in faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the WAY that leads to eternal life.” (*from UM Baptismal Covenant*)

## **Definitions for Staff Person, Servant-Volunteer and Helper**

**Staff Person** – a person employed by Zion church to minister to children or youth who: has been screened and trained in Safe Sanctuaries practices; performs tasks specified in a mutually agreed upon job description; and is accountable to a supervisor for work habits and products. All staff will have clearances and be 18 years of age or older.

**Servant-Volunteer** – a person 18 years of age or older engaged in ministry to children or youth through Zion Church who has been screened, submitted references and trained in Safe Sanctuaries practices. A Servant-Volunteer works under the supervision of Staff Person. A Servant-Volunteer is required to complete clearances.

**Helper** – a youth engaged in ministry to children or youth through the Zion Church who works only in an assisting role under the supervision of Staff Person or a Servant-Volunteer. A Helper will not be required to complete clearances.

All Servant-Volunteers in ministry should be members of Zion Church and shall have regularly attended Zion for at least six-months prior to assuming a leadership role in its ministries.

### **Basic Procedures for “Safe” Ministry with Children and Youth**

#### **Two-Adult Rule**

Simply stated, the “Two-Adult Rule” requires that a minimum of two adults be present in the room at all times during any church-sponsored ministry or event with children or youth. When a single stand-alone event is occurring, there must be two adults present. When married couples are serving together, there must be a third unrelated adult who can also serve as a roaming adult. During times when there are multiple classes occurring at the same time, it is not always feasible to have two adults in every room. Therefore, during those times, an adult will be assigned to randomly visit classrooms to provide support to children and adults.

#### **Training**

All Servant-Volunteers are required to participate in an orientation and training session and complete a Servant-Volunteer Profile. This training should occur prior to a Servant-Volunteer beginning to work with children or youth. Additional training will occur whenever the Safe Sanctuary Policy is updated or changed. The training will include but not be limited to information on the:

- Church policy for the prevention of child abuse
- Procedures and methods to be used in teaching and leading a classroom or group of children or youth.
- Appropriate steps for reporting a suspected incident of abuse
- Information regarding the law of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania regarding abuse.

Servant-Volunteer Profiles should be completed prior to attending this training. Participants completing the training will be given the opportunity to sign a Participation Covenant Statement.

The original, signed statement will be kept in a confidential file in the church office, and a copy will be provided to the Servant-Volunteer upon request.

### **All Leaders Must Sign Participation Covenant Agreements**

A Covenant Statement has been developed for use at Zion Church, and all Staff and Servant-Volunteers are asked to sign it prior to providing leadership or participating in any ministry with children and youth—this includes providing transportation. This Covenant is available for inspection in our Safe Sanctuary files.

### **References and Clearances**

Servant-Volunteers and Staff Persons must provide the names, addresses and phone numbers of three references. The references may not be related to the Servant-Volunteer or Staff Person and at least one reference must not be part of the Zion congregation. The appropriate ministry director will contact the references of all Servant-Volunteers. All paid Staff will have clearances completed in addition to providing references on the employment application. The Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) will be responsible for contacting the references for all Staff. In addition to the above-mentioned references, all Servant-Volunteers 18 years of age or older will complete clearances. Depending on which clearances are submitted, additional clearances may be necessary. Zion Church reserves the right to request additional clearances as the situation warrants.

### **The “Five-Years-Older” Rule**

It is the policy of Zion Church to require Staff and Servant-Volunteers to be at least five years older than those whom they lead or for whom they are responsible.

### **Volunteers Who are Under 18**

All Servant-Volunteers who minister to children and youth must be over eighteen (18) years of age. Those under eighteen (18) may be used as “Helpers” in ministry, however they too, must be under direct supervision of an adult at all times. “Helpers” may be used in areas of our youth and children’s ministries, however a Helper does not count as part of the “Two-Adult Rule”, nor may a Helper be permitted to be alone with children or fully in charge of a ministry with children or youth.

### **Windows in All Classroom Doors**

Every classroom, teaching area, and Staff office at Zion is equipped with a door that includes a clear, unobstructed window. When events are in session, we encourage that doors be closed to help ensure safety and to keep children from wandering outside the classroom. To provide visual access to the room, all windows are to remain unobstructed.

## **Bathroom Needs**

When possible, children will be encouraged to take care of their own bathroom needs, but should a child require assistance, the outer bathroom door will remain open while a *Safe Sanctuaries* certified Servant-Volunteer or Staff Person assists the child. Assistance for elementary age children should be limited to unfastening and fastening clothing. If more assistance is needed, parental permission should be received in advance. When accompanying a child to take care of his/her own bathroom needs, the *Safe Sanctuaries* Certified Servant-Volunteer or Staff Person will check the bathroom and stalls prior to the child entering the bathroom. Again, the outer bathroom door should be left open. Elementary age children can walk to the bathroom without an adult. It is encouraged that with elementary age children there be a buddy system created to help insure safety. Preschool age children should always be escorted to the bathroom. When escorting a preschooler to the bathroom, always take two kids so you are not alone with a child. A Helper shall never provide assistance with bathroom needs

## **Event Records**

**Event records** for activities in which Participants are outside of the direct supervision of their parents/guardians, shall require the following:

- a. **Activity Registration, Parental/Guardian Permission, Signed Emergency Medical Release, and Student Conduct Form** – including Participant’s name, address, birthday, parent/guardian information, telephone number, emergency contact information, pertinent info about the Participant (allergies, medications, special instructions, etc.), such as medical history and insurance information. These forms will be maintained and secured in a designated folder by the Staff Person or Servant-Volunteer in charge of the ministry or activity for the duration of the ministry or activity.
- b. Persons coordinating off-site activities will assure every Participant has completed the appropriate forms, and will take copies of these forms along on the event.
- c. **Accurate participation records** shall be maintained for all Zion activities or events involving children or youth by the Staff Person or Servant-Volunteer supervising the event. At a minimum, these records will list the date and hours of the activity, its location, the names of the participants as they sign in and out of an event (including whether any were dismissed early and the times of such dismissals), and the names of all Adults involved directly in the ministry or activity, as well as any other Helpers on site that day.

## **On-Site, Off-Site and Overnight Events/Activities**

- a. The following **minimum ratios** will be maintained for **off-site activities** (in addition to the Two-Adult Rule): In co-ed groups please remember to have both male and female adults present.
  - i. Nursery through 4-years old – Parents are required to attend the activity
  - ii. Kindergarten through grade 5 – 1:6 (one adult to every six children)
  - iii. Youth (grades 6-12) – 1:10 (one adult to every ten youth).

- iv. Children and youth with special needs- ratios will be evaluated on a case by case basis
- b. Advance notice will be given to parents prior to events, and will include: date, time, and location, the means of transportation, and a summary of activities and events. Specific parental/guardian approval for off-site / overnight events is required. Should details of an event's start/end times change (or other pertinent information), the event's coordinator is to have a plan for notifying parents. Changes in transportation plans should be communicated with parents as well.
- c. All medications and medication instructions shall be given to a designated Adult prior to the trip for disbursement as appropriate, and will be enclosed in its original container (including prescription meds). [Exception: Epi-pens and inhalers may be carried by youth, with the understanding that they will be secured and out of sight unless needed; due to the nature of these medications, adult leaders will be aware that the youth is carrying medication, and will be familiar with how to use an Epi-pen in case of emergency] The designated adult will keep a log of when medicine is given. When possible the designated adult should be someone with medical training.
- d. Appropriate buddy systems, check-in times, and appropriate male and female supervision need to be established for each ministry or activity. The Staff Person or Servant-Volunteer in charge of the ministry or event will assure the setting (and any equipment used) is appropriate for activities, and by implementing the above-named measures, will minimize risk of incident or injury to all participants. Events where direct adult supervision of youth is not feasible (e.g. *Creation*, amusement parks, youth rallies and other large-group public events) the Staff Person or Servant-Volunteer in charge will, at the minimum, incorporate a 2 or more person buddy system and check-ins for all participants as part of appropriate adult supervision. In cases where one female and one male are together, the buddy system requires there to be 3 people.
- e. It is recommended that event coordinators attempt to secure at least one (1) Adult with current certification in First Aid and CPR for each trip or event, and that all Adult leadership participating in the trip or event is aware of such person(s).
- f. For overnight youth events:
- i. There will be separate sleeping areas for males and females.
  - ii. At least two Adults will be present in each sleeping area, and will be of the same gender as the youth in that area.
  - iii. Sleeping areas should be pre-arranged by Staff or Servant-Volunteer in charge prior to the trip.
  - iv. Separate shower and bathrooms facilities are highly encouraged. When separate facilities are not possible, procedures for use of the facility will be conveyed to all event Participants by the Staff Person or Servant-Volunteer in charge.
  - v. If Youth are found to be in violation of the established rules of the event, the situation will be handled by the Staff Person or Servant-Volunteer in charge as deemed appropriate. Said action may result in the parent(s) of the Participant being notified regardless of the time of day/night, and the Participant may be required to leave the event.

Adults must respect the privacy of youth (during such situations as changing, showering, etc.), and should intrude only to the extent that health or safety may require. Adults must protect their own privacy in similar situations as well.

### **Transportation**

When events with children or youth involve transportation from Zion to an event and back, adequate and safe transportation plans will be arranged including:

- Application of the “Two-Adult Rule” per vehicle [Conference insurance policy excludes the use of extended vans.] If there are several cars, it is not necessary to have two adults per car, but the cars must stay in groups of two or more. If the “Two-Adult Rule” is not feasible to maintain, drivers will make reasonable effort to transport no less than two participants at a time.
- Passengers in any vehicle cannot exceed the number of proper seats and the use of seat belts. Seatbelts must be used at all times by all passengers. Zion Church will follow Pennsylvania State law in regards to car seats and booster seats. It is the parent’s responsibility to provide car seats and booster seats.
- Passengers should have enough space to be reasonably comfortable
- Luggage and equipment should be packed securely and not with the passengers
- Drivers should be a Servant-Volunteer or Staff.
- All drivers must allow Zion Church to keep a copy of their driver’s licenses on file. Zion Church reserves the right to do a driver’s license check through Pennsylvania Department of Transportation. If the driver has lived in other states during the past five years, Zion may do driver’s license checks in those states as well.
- All drivers must have personal liability insurance on their vehicles, be a minimum age of 25 years of age, and have a driver disclosure form on file.
- Drivers will practice safe driving procedures such as assuring all passengers remain properly secured throughout the trip, and by obeying all posted speed laws and regulations.
- The Staff Person or the Servant-Volunteer in charge should provide as necessary any appropriate maps, directions, and emergency contact numbers to each driver, as well as a communication plan for contacting assistance should an emergency arise.

### **One-on-One Interaction**

#### **General Principles:**

Conversations and interactions between Staff Persons or Servant Volunteers and Participants should remain confidential in most cases. Conversations where a person indicates they might

harm themselves or others cannot be kept confidential. Information pertaining to a conversation of this nature needs to be shared with the Staff Person or Servant Volunteer in charge without delay.

Zion Church encourages all Staff persons, Servant Volunteers, and Helpers to use caution when interacting with Participants through social media outlets (ex: Facebook, Twitter, etc. see Cyber Safety section) or digital information exchange (text messaging, emailing, or instant messaging). A record should be kept of all such interactions in the event that such interactions should be called into question later.

### **Onsite One-on-One Interactions:**

**If a Participant requests to speak privately with a Staff Person, a Servant-Volunteer, or a Helper,** that person must ensure that he/she and the Participant are completely visible to others while talking, even though they may not be overheard. In addition, he/she must inform the Staff Person or Servant Volunteer in charge of the conversation or interaction prior to it taking place.

### **Offsite Meeting or Mentoring:**

We recognize that there are times where one-on-one mentoring can only happen effectively off campus. In these cases, the following steps must be followed and maintained.

- Only Safe-Sanctuary trained, cleared Servant-Volunteers or Staff Persons may meet with a participant one-on-one off Zion Church's campus.
- A one-time written consent and a continual verbal (over the phone, via text message, or via email) consent from a parent/guardian of the participant must be obtained prior to any offsite one-on-one meeting.
- Parents/guardians must be informed and approve of any and all meetings before they are scheduled or commence.
- Staff Persons or Servant-Volunteers and Participants should drive separately to the designated meeting place. When this is not possible, written parental permission is required, and the Staff person or Servant-Volunteer in charge must be informed and approve of the meeting.
- Staff persons or Servant-Volunteers in charge must be made aware and approve of any meetings between Servant-Volunteers and Participants. At the beginning and conclusion of each meeting, a time-stamped message (email, text message, etc.) should be sent to the Staff Person or Servant Volunteer in charge so as to keep a record of the meeting on hand for future use.

### **Advance Notice to Parents**

Parents will always have advance notice and full information regarding any and all ministries and events in which their children or youth will be participating. Written permission must be provided for all children and youth to participate in special ministries and events.

### **Cyber Safety**

The internet and portable devices allow people to stay in contact with each other more easily than at any other time in the history of civilization. Some incredible ministry can take place using modern technology, but as with all forms of ministry there are some inherent risks

involved with the use of electronic communications. However, following basic *Safe Sanctuaries* procedures can help to minimize those risks. There is no such thing as privacy in cyberspace. Consider anything and everything on the internet as public information. Here are some recommendations:

### **Receive parental/guardian permission.**

In addition to general permission to participate in a Zion ministry, it is required to receive advance parental permission for children and youth in writing for:

1. E-mailing, Instant Messaging (IM'ing), calling, texting, or sending data to a child or youth by computer, PDA, or cell phone (keep in mind "free" minutes and data plans vary tremendously even with the same carrier); and.
2. The sharing of any full name or contact information.

### **Never post easily identifiable information online.**

1. If you communicate by e-mail, do not use "broadcast" e-mails. Use the "Bcc" option (blind carbon copy) so that each recipient sees only his or her address when a message is received.
2. Be cautious when transmitting easily identifiable information like event dates, times, locations, or participants.
3. Limit what is communicated in electronic prayer requests. When placing a child or youth, on an electronic prayer list, consider using only first names. If someone must know the last name or the mailing address of the individual, have her or him call the church.

### **Limit individual communications with children and youth**

1. Conduct any communications in a professional manner. (Even though you may be a sounding board for a person having a bad day, the reverse is not true.)
2. Save all communications you have with children and youth (i.e. instant messages (IMs), chat room conversations, e-mails, etc.). An electronic "paper trail" can be important.
3. Know the limits of electronic communication. Electronic communication is not a good avenue for mentoring or counseling.
4. If you are uneasy about any topic addressed in an e-mail or an e-mail in general, send a blind carbon copy to a parent/guardian (if appropriate) or another trusted adult. **Honor privacy, but not secrecy.**
5. If abuse is divulged electronically, follow standard reporting procedures.
6. Any communication indicating potential harm to self or others needs to be reported to the Staff Person or Servant Volunteer in charge.

### **Safety Measures for sharing photos electronically**

It is the policy of Zion United Methodist Church to use photographs and videos taken at its various ministry activities, events, and programs in church-produced materials including, but not limited to, bulletins, posters, brochures, newsletters, other printed materials, audio/visual presentations, and on the church web site. We do this to enhance the quality of information that we provide to our members, guests, and our community, as well as to celebrate faith, fellowship and fun shared by the church family. Pictures give visitors a good idea of what we have to offer and what to expect when they attend our church.



However, because the dissemination of photographs and videos cannot necessarily be limited, it is the policy of Zion Church to protect the privacy of church members, their minor children, and other individuals whose images are published with the following:

1. **General group or crowd photographs:** Zion Church reserves the right to take photographs or video recordings at worship services or any other church-related activities in which individuals are not prominently featured and no identifying information is presented, and to use any of these photos or recordings for fellowship or promotional purposes in media such as, but not limited to, brochures and flyers, the church website, and online photo galleries, without seeking or requiring the consent of each person represented. In addition to any event or gathering taking place on church property, church-related activities also include gatherings at other locations such as parks, sporting events, mission sites, etc.
2. **Opting-out:** Permission to photograph is assumed unless a person indicates in writing their request not to be photographed. Parents/guardians who do not wish their child's photo or video to be potentially posted online or otherwise displayed, regardless of the context, should send a written note or email to the church office, and Zion Church will make every effort to exclude the indicated minor from any individual or small group photography. Please note that children may still be included in general group or crowd photos without identifying information; however, you may always request that any photo be removed from display.
3. If copyright for a photo is held by someone other than Zion Church, we will receive permission to post it and gladly provide credit if desired by the photographer and will not knowingly use a copyrighted photo.
4. We will not knowingly post anything that would be embarrassing, objectionable or hurtful to anyone in the photo.
5. We do not identify children or youth by name, first or last, in the photos we post online. We also will not list age, addresses, email addresses or phone numbers.
6. **Requesting removal of a photograph or video:** any individual who appears in a photo/video (or whose minor children appear in a photo/video) that has been posted online may request that it be removed for any reason, even if prior permission had been granted, by sending a written note or email to the church office. Please indicate the person or persons involved and the photo or video in question, and it will be promptly removed from the website or other display where it is found.

### **Safety Measure for using social networking sites.**

Social networking sites are popular with many people:

1. Set privacy settings to limit who can see your profile otherwise people may still be able to view your full profile.

2. Be cautious who can be your friend. It is prudent to use judgment in accepting requests from youth. Remember everything you post, your “friends” will see. Integrity needs to be maintained.
3. Use higher level security features even if you have a restricted profile (such as requiring your approval of all comments posted to your site.)
4. Do not post anything to your social networking site that you would not want attached to your resume or printed in the church newsletter or bulletin. (The same goes for blogs.)
5. Remove or do not post inappropriate comments, photos, etc.
6. Encourage youth to follow these same guidelines.

**Refrain from giving out passwords to Zion ministry accounts and wireless network**

**Parent and Family Education**

Our ministry with children and youth is a sacred covenant (made at Baptism) and partnership between the Church and its many families. Zion has made a serious commitment to being a “safe sanctuary” for our children and youth. As a further ministry, Zion will continue to provide its families and the community with educational events and opportunities to learn and to grow as the people of God who have primary care concerns for its children and youth.

**Insurance**

Zion Church, through the Susquehanna Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, carries liability insurance for its ministry on all its ministers including all Staff Persons, Servant-Volunteers, and Helpers.

## Response to Child Abuse

**This section refers to alleged abuse that may have happened at the church or away from the church.**

Mandated Reporters are responsible to know their rights and responsibilities under Pennsylvania Law in regards to Mandated Reporting.

A. WHO ARE MANDATED REPORTERS? There are now fourteen separate categories of individuals who are mandated reporters, including all Clergy and all employees/volunteers who, as part of a regularly scheduled program, activity or service, accept responsibility for a child or have direct contact with children. EXAMPLES: Child Care Employees, Sunday School Teachers, Youth Fellowship Volunteers, Camp Volunteers.

B. WHEN MUST YOU REPORT AS A MANDATED REPORTER? If you have reasonable cause to suspect a child is a victim of child abuse, a report must be made, without exception. This includes situations where (i) you come into contact with a child that has been abused, (ii) an individual makes a specific disclosure to you that an identifiable child is the victim of child abuse or (iii) an individual 14 years of age or older makes a specific disclosure to you that he/she has committed child abuse.

C. TO WHOM IS THE REPORT MADE? Immediately call Childline at 800-932-0313 to make the required report and tell your immediate supervisor within the church organization. You must personally make the report, and you can no longer rely on someone else (for example, a supervisor) to make the report. In addition, a written report on CY-47 Form must be made to the county Children and Youth Agency within 48 hours of your oral report to Childline.

D. WHAT IF I AM NOT A MANDATED REPORTER AND SUSPECT CHILD ABUSE HAS OCCURRED? Any person may, and should, report suspected child abuse, even if the person is not a Mandated Reporter. These individuals are called Permissive Reporters.

E. WHEN IN DOUBT ALWAYS REPORT, REPORT, REPORT!

F. MANDATED AND PERMISSIVE REPORTERS ARE IMMUNE FROM CIVIL LIABILITY FOR GOOD FAITH REPORTING OF SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE. But, be very careful about making any public statements about the report, as this may give rise to a defamation claim.

*This Safe Sanctuary Policy is for all youth and children's ministries of Zion Church. While Rainbow Junction is a children's ministry of Zion church, Rainbow Junction is licensed by the State of Pennsylvania through the Department of Human Services (DHS). DHS requires all child care centers to follow state regulations. All Rainbow Junction employees are trained on these state regulations in place of Zion's Safe Sanctuary policy. The Rainbow Junction director will keep complete employee files containing all employee paperwork required by the state. If a Rainbow Junction employee serves at Zion Church in a ministry other than Rainbow Junction, that employee will complete the safe sanctuary training for Zion Church and Zion Church will keep a safe sanctuary file for that person.*

Safe Sanctuary Policy  
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