

**Safe Environment Policy
For Children, Youth and Disabled Adults
Niceville United Methodist Church
Updated May 20, 2010**

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to enable our church to provide an environment that is safe, healthy, and conducive to learning and forming positive relationships. Protecting minors (those under 18 years of age) and disabled adults is of utmost importance in all areas of ministry. This policy governs the conduct of all paid and volunteer staff of Niceville United Methodist Church.

Responsibility

All staff, paid and volunteer, shall be responsible for implementing this policy.

Worker Selection and Screening

A process for selecting and screening workers, as described below, shall be followed. This process is for both volunteer and paid staff and shall include: a formal application, reference checks, formal interviewing, application processing, a “six-month rule” – six months of participation in our church, church membership may also be required, and abuse prevention training. In some cases, such as adults working with children, teenagers or disabled adults will be required to obtain a full background check including a fingerprint check with Florida Department of Law Enforcement. The results of these checks will be kept on file in the church and will be restricted to maintain confidentiality.

Formal Application Process

All persons desiring to work with, supervise, or teach minors or disabled adults must complete an “Application for Ministry.” Anyone refusing to complete the application will not be considered for placement. Applications will be submitted to the Ministry Leader. Applicants must be at least 16 years old on the date they sign their application and 16 – 18 year olds may only serve under the direction of an adult.

Formal Interview

After the application has been completed, the Ministry Leader shall conduct a face-to-face interview of the candidate to review the application and discuss information pertaining to the suitability of the candidate to work with minors or the disabled. At this interview, the applicant shall provide official positive photographic identification (drivers license, military ID, and other government issued ID), which verifies the applicant’s identity.

Reference Checks

The completed application must include at least two character references. These references shall not be family members, relatives, pastors of this church or ministry leaders. The church will contact these references, churches, organizations, and prior employers to assess the applicant’s suitability to work with minors or disabled adults. All information received from all reference contacts shall be kept in strict confidence.

The Six-Month Rule

Applicants will not be approved to work with minors until they have attended the church regularly for at least six months. “Regular attendance” is defined as attendance in at least three Sunday services per month. Applications may be submitted and processing

may begin before the Six Month Rule has been met, but approval shall not be made before this rule has been satisfied.

Abuse Prevention Training

Workers shall receive orientation and training concerning the definition and prevention of abuse. Such training will include a thorough review of this policy.

If an applicant has a history of being arrested, labeled, or charged as a child predator or child molester, he/she will **not** be allowed to work with minors or disabled adults.

Types of Abuse

Abuse is categorized in five primary forms: physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and ritual abuse.

Worker Supervision

1. Two-Worker Rule

At least two approved workers should be present with minors or disabled adults at all times. This rule protects minors and disabled adults by reducing the risk of abuse, and protects workers by reducing the risk of false accusations. The two-worker rule applies to all official church functions, including but not limited to services, classes, field trips, and parties, etc. Two adults shall be required in each vehicle transporting minors in relation to official church functions. There is one exception to the two-worker rule. When there are two or more high school students present it is permissible for there to be only one approved worker.

2. Adequate Staff

All official church functions that involve minors and disabled adults **will** be staffed adequately enough to ensure safe activities and compliance with this policy. All paid and volunteer personnel working with children in the 5th grade or below must be at least four years older than the age group with which they are working. Volunteer and paid staff working with students in the 6th – 12th grade or with disabled adults must be at least 21 years of age or they must be in college and work under the supervision of an adult.

3. Diapering and Restroom Policies

All workers will follow the diapering policy specified in the Nursery Policy. An adult or youth employee or volunteer will **not** enter a restroom alone with a child. They will **not** enter a restroom stall with a child. Children who are capable of going to the restroom by themselves should be allowed to do so, but workers will adequately monitor the children's travel to and from the restroom. Workers may provide assistance in unfastening and fastening young children's clothing, but such assistance will **not** take place inside a restroom stall. In the Nursery Area, doorstops will be used to keep restroom doors open to provide easy access for children and to provide an atmosphere that insures a safe environment for all.

4. Administration of Medicine Prohibited

Workers will **not** administer any medication of any kind to any child. Medication may be administered only by a child's parent/guardian. In special cases, such as field trips or youth trips, exceptions will be made.

5. Reporting Requirements

Everyone will be responsible for reporting child abuse. All workers who observe abuse or have reasonable suspicion that abuse has occurred will immediately report such

concerns to the Staff person responsible for their ministry. The types of abuse are; physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and ritual abuse. Ministry Leaders are required by law to report allegations to the Florida Abuse Hotline 1-800-96-ABUSE.

Procedures for Reporting Alleged Abuse

1. Niceville United Methodist Church will respond to all alleged or suspected incidences of child/youth abuse in an effort to protect the child/youth and any individuals involved in the incident. It is not the policy of the church to prove whether the alleged suspected abuse has or has not occurred, as this is the responsibility of the proper legal authorities.
2. Upon suspecting or learning of an allegation of abuse, you should:
 - a. Report the situation immediately to the staff member who is in charge of the event or activity.
 - b. The staff member in charge of the event or activity will immediately suspend and remove the individual from the duties involving minors and/or disabled adults pending external and internal investigation.
 - c. The staff member in charge of the event or activity will immediately contact the Executive Pastor.
 - d. The Executive Pastor and staff member will decide who will inform the parents of the allegations and respond to questions and concerns.
 - e. The staff person will inform appropriate legal or state authorities by telephone and within five days of the alleged or suspected abuse, a written report will be submitted to the state agency, concerning the incident and a copy placed on file in the church office.
 - f. All such matters will be dealt with in the strictest confidence. Any person reporting alleged abuse will refrain from any discussion about the alleged incident with anyone other than the staff person.
 - g. If necessary, the church will prepare a press release that appropriately responds to the alleged abuse situation and actions being taken by the church. One person from the church shall be appointed by the Senior Pastor to be the spokesperson to the media.

6. Safe Sanctuaries Team

The Safe Sanctuaries Team will include the following: Executive Pastor, Minister of Recreation, Chairperson of SPR, Chairperson of Trustees, Student Minister, Minister of Adult and Family Ministries, Minister to Children, Mother's Day Out Director, Nursery Coordinator, and Minister to Singles.