

# Child Protection Policy

## Collins & West Hartland

### United Methodist Church

*People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them. (Mark 10:13-16 NIV)*

This incident from the ministry of Jesus speaks of the value our Lord placed on children and the example of faith that they provide for the rest of us. As followers of Jesus, we understand that children are inherently valuable members of Christ's community.

Jesus highlighted not only the faith and openness of children, but also their vulnerability. This vulnerability puts children at risk, but it also places them close to God. Their dependence on God may be what Jesus was trying to get his disciples to see as a model for their own faith. This vulnerability and dependence makes the protection and support of the community of faith even more important. Jesus was teaching that, within the community of believers, there must be protection for each of us in our dependence on God and one each other. As followers of Christ, we resolve to protect children in their vulnerability and also to learn from them as we all grow in the faith.

Our culture appears to be experiencing an increase in the incidence of child abuse and neglect. As much as we do not like to think about abusive and hurtful things happening in the church, it is clear that it is our duty as the Church to guard and protect the children and youth who participate in our ministries and to prevent false claims from being made against us.

As a caring congregation sensitive to the needs of our families, we feel that it is of the utmost importance to send a message to our community that we are a safe haven for families. In order to do this we must follow and establish certain policies and procedures for all volunteers. Volunteers are critical parts of the ongoing work of reaching our community for Christ, and for this reason we ask that you follow the guidelines below. We desire to fulfill our responsibilities before the Lord Jesus Christ and to all those who enter the doors of our church by making our team of volunteers the most dedicated individuals, the best equipped, and the best trained. Thank you for considering this ministry as unto the Lord. The leaders of this church are here to help you accomplish the task that the Lord has placed before you.

The purpose of the Child Protection Policy of the Collins and West Hartland United Methodist Church is to provide procedures specifically designed to protect children and

youth associated with the activities of the Church and to establish a means of dealing with alleged, reported, or suspected incidence of abuse.

**We hereby, resolve:**

1. To safeguard the children and youth of our church from abuse and neglect.
2. To protect church staff and volunteer workers from potential allegations of abuse.
3. To limit the extent of our church's legal risk and liability due to abuse.

**I. A DEFINITION OF ABUSE**

According to, *Stop Child Abuse Before It Happens*, child abuse falls into four categories:

- **Neglect.** A parent or guardian's unwillingness or inability to meet the basic need of the child. The parent that does not feed, clothe, love, supervise, and protect his or her child is by any standard neglecting the child (67).
- **Physical Abuse.** When children are assaulted, intentionally and deliberately. Injuries such as burning, biting, cutting, twisting of limbs and even pinching are included in this category. Some injuries can be seen easily, while others are not visible. Physical abuse is the most visible form of child maltreatment (68).
- **Emotional/Verbal Abuse.** When parents establish a pattern of humiliating, blaming, scaring, belittling, criticizing, or rejecting a child. This type of abuse seriously lowers a child's self-worth and sense of control over his environment. It may also result in unhealthy development (69).
- **Sexual Abuse.** Sexual contact with a child by an adult or another (usually older) child. It can include oral, anal, or vaginal sex; fondling; and rape. Voyeurism and pornography are also included under this category.

Although, our Christian concern for children leads us to be saddened when any form of child abuse takes place anywhere, our major policy need is to be certain that abuse does not occur within the framework of any Collins or West Hartland United Methodist Church program or ministry with children and youth. This policy is intended to help our congregation make Collins and West Hartland United Methodist Church a truly safe and caring place.

## II. Qualifications and Screening of Volunteers

### A. Qualifications for Volunteers

- Those directly responsible for ministry to youth must be persons with an active faith in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior.
- Other persons on the journey to faith in Christ may volunteer, provided they meet all other qualifications.
- Must have been attending our worship services for at least six months.
- Must complete the application process.
- Must read and agree to comply with the policies and procedures of the church.
- Must complete the Video Training Seminar **THE CHURCH AGAINST ABUSE**
- Must complete the Verification of Compliance Form

### B. Screening of Volunteers

In an effort to create the safest possible environment within our church, each volunteer eighteen years of age and older who works with the Church's children or youth programs either regularly or occasionally, on or beyond the church grounds, will be screened and will be trained on child protection issues.

Leaders of all community groups who use the Church facilities will read the policy and sign an acknowledgment form indicating that the policy has been read. The Cub Scouts sponsored by our church and other organizations that use the facility will be guided by the rules and regulations of their respective organizations.

The Staff Parish Relations Committee may set additional screening and performance standards for paid staff.

### C. Application Process: How to Apply for Volunteer Ministry

- All applicants will secure a **Volunteer Application Form** through the church office and return it to the Youth Director or Senior Pastor.
- All information is completely confidential and is kept in a confidential file, available only to the Senior Pastor and Youth Director.

- After reviewing the written application, the Youth Director or Senior Pastor may choose to interview the applicant before placing him/her in a position of responsibility. Indications that such an interview must take place include:
  - a. The person asks for a wavier of the six-month rule.
  - b. The person wants to work with only one age group.
  - c. The person does not want/need/like close supervision.
  - d. The person has been charged or convicted of a crime against children or youth.
  - e. The person has had driver's privileges suspended.
  
- Before beginning work with either children or youth, each volunteer will read, understand, and agree to abide by the Church's Child Protection Policy.
  
- All youth volunteers will attend one church-offered child protection training session every other year.

#### Updated Information

- It is the responsibility of the volunteer to keep all information on the application form up to date.

### **III. GUIDELINES FOR THE SUPERVISION OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

In order to provide a safe environment for all our children and youth, and to reduce or eliminate the likelihood of false claims being filed, the following policies will be adhered to by all volunteers and employees of the Collins and West Hartland UMC.

- Under no circumstance may a volunteer or employee of the Collins and West Hartland UMC correct a child or youth with physical punishment.
  
- Negative behavior from a child shall not be responded to with verbal abuse. An uncooperative child/youth will forfeit his/her opportunity to participate in an activity. If necessary, parents/guardians will be called to provide further disciplinary action.

- Youth shall not be permitted to leave an activity without written parental permission.
- Touching of a child/youth's breasts, buttocks, genital area, inner thigh, or the clothing covering the immediate areas of those parts of the body, is strictly prohibited. The only exception to this procedure would be necessary hygienic care for infants and toddlers (i.e. changing diapers).
- At all times classrooms and activities require two adults to be in supervision. An adolescent, 16 years or older, may be used to substitute for one adult, provided that adolescent has completed **The Abuse Prevention Program** and has been approved for the volunteer position.
- Workers should avoid allowing one-on-one situations to occur. The only exception to this would be with parental awareness and consent.
- If a child or youth is placed in your care, you are responsible to take all reasonable precautions to provide safety for them. This includes not leaving that child/youth unattended.
- General safety rules shall be followed. Supervision should be especially given as to when running is appropriate and when it is not. Care and caution should be followed when leading a group of children outside across the parking area.
- It is expected that all individuals involved in ministry to youth shall demonstrate appropriate Christian behavior and conduct.

**How to Plan a Youth Event:**

- **A Preliminary Youth Event Request Form** shall be filled out and given to the Youth Director. Permission for the Event must be granted before any plans are made.
- **A Parental Permission Slip** must be secured prior to a planned event.
- A Final Youth Event Request Form shall be filled out and given to the Youth Director at the time the Event is to occur.

**Adult/Youth Ratio**

- There shall be adequate adult supervision for all youth activities at or away from the Church building. The following standards are presumed adequate:

Persons Attending	Standard Adult Supervision
Children, grades 1-4	1 adult to 4-6 children
Youth in grades 5-8	1 adult to 5-7 youth
Youth in grades 9-12	1 adult to 6-8 youth

**Medical Emergencies:**

- Immediate parental notification shall follow a serious medical injury. 911 shall be called if deemed necessary.

**Permission to Leave an Activity:**

- Written permission from a parent/guardian must be given to the adult supervisor of an activity if youth leave the activity before it is scheduled to end.

**Medications:**

- All medications brought into the church building shall be registered with the adult supervisor of an activity and written permission granted from parent/guardian for medication to be distributed to youth.

**Contagious Diseases**

- Parents will be notified when it is discovered that a child in our Child Care Areas has a contagious disease.

**Activities Off the Church Grounds**

- All policies and procedures shall apply when any group is traveling or away from the church building.
- Persons designated to provide transportation to or from church events must be:
  - Known to the designated leader of the event.
  - Be at least 21 years old.
  - Have a valid state driver's license for the vehicle being operated.
  - Have proof of insurance, and
  - Have received, read and signed a copy of the Collins and West Hartland United Methodist Church Child Protection Policy.

- When transporting youth to and from an event by car, all persons shall wear safety belts. All drivers shall travel within posted speed limits.

### **Care & Use of Equipment and Facilities**

- Church equipment should be used properly so as to avoid damage and/or destruction.
- Reasonable care is expected for the use of the church facility, including: (cf guidelines for use of FH Hall).

### **Open Door Policy**

- Parents and staff of the church may visit and observe an activity at any time.
- It is requested that all adults notify the church office prior to visiting an activity.

### **Child Care During Worship and Other Congregational Events**

- Child Care is provided for infants/preschool children during worship. Grades K-4 remain with parents/guardians during worship.
- The "Cry Room" at Collins is available only for parents with newborn infants or those under one year of age. Parents can care for their infants while still having audio/visual connection with the worship service.
- No one but the scheduled volunteers is to be in the Child Care room during worship. Substitutes for scheduled volunteers are to be cleared by the Nursery Directors.
- No one but parents with their children is to be in the "Cry Room" during worship.
- Parents are to "check in/out" children left in our Volunteer Child Care during worship
- The Child Care area and Cry Room are to be "picked up" following use:
  - All toys are to be put away
  - No toys are to be in the areas that might cause choking.
  - Juice and crackers are the only acceptable foods for the Child Care Areas
  - No food is to be left out.
  - Infant and toddler toys are to be cleaned weekly with warm soap and water.

#### IV. RESPONSE BY CHURCH WORKERS TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE

As caring Christians, we are committed to protect and be an advocate for children and youth participating in the life of the church. The Church is entrusted to provide an emotionally safe, spiritually grounded, healthy environment for children, youth, and adults in which they are protected from abuse. It is our policy to report abuse whenever it comes to our attention regardless of where that abuse takes place. We shall report abuse to stop existing abuse and to prevent further abuse. To report abuse is to be a witness to the world of the love and justice of God. Reporting abuse is a form of ministering to the needs of those crying out for help. If abuse occurs, it is our intention to act as an advocate... providing support, information, assistance and intervention. We seek to provide a supportive atmosphere, offering both objectivity and empathy as we seek to create a climate in which healing can take place.

If abuse is observed by or disclosed to a volunteer and/or paid staff member of the church, that person shall report the incident to the Senior Pastor and/or the Youth Director. Together they shall determine the appropriate response, which may include one or all of the following:

1. The suspected abuse shall be reported to Children's Services immediately. This is a requirement of the law.
2. If the alleged abuser is a volunteer or paid staff of the church, once the safety of the victim is assured and confidentiality is protected, the alleged abuser shall be confronted and, at the very least, removed from the setting in which the abuse has occurred.
  - a. The Pastor shall consult with the District Superintendent.
  - b. Any contact with the secular press shall be handled by the Senior Pastor.
3. A written report of the basic information shall be kept to ensure on-going ministry to, and advocacy for, victims and others involved. A form for this purpose shall be available in the church office. **(See attached, Suspicion of Abuse Report Form.)**

This report shall be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It shall be filed in a secure place in order to insure confidentiality. It shall be written in ink or typed (to prevent it from being changed.)

## V. **EDUCATION OF PERSONS WHO WORK WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

Each year the church will schedule the video seminar **STOP CHILD ABUSE BEFORE IT HAPPENS**. This will be a person's initial introduction to the Child Protection Policy of the Collins and West Hartland United Methodist Church. Attendance at this seminar shall be required of all persons who have direct contact with children or youth in the church's ministry.

Each year the church will provide in service training for all volunteers continuing, or coming back into, ministry with children and youth. Attendance at this training shall be required on an annual basis. This training will include:

- The qualification and screening of volunteers
- The church's policies on reporting abuse.
- The church's policies on age of adults in supervision.
- The church's policies on the ratio of adults to children/youth.
- The meaning of confidentiality.
- The role of one who hears a disclosure
- Report forms
- Appropriate ways to discipline.

The Youth Ministry Team of the Church shall develop ways of educating the congregation on abuse, its effects, and our policies. Such education might include displays/bulletin boards, programs/presentations by knowledgeable persons, films, etc.

The Church Staff shall have the responsibility of developing ministries of support for persons in the congregation or community who are survivors of abuse, or the families of survivors of abuse.

Proposed November 2000

Adopted by the Administrative Council