

FOREST HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to ensure that the members and staff of Forest Hill UMC do all they can to provide a safe and secure environment for children (birth to age 18), employees, volunteers and all persons entrusted to our care. By establishing these policies and procedures we demonstrate our commitment to provide a safe environment as we grow in our relationship with God.

Theological Foundations

“Then Jesus took a little child and put her among them; and taking her in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.’”(paraphrase of Mark 9:36-37) Jesus also said, “If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones..., it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea.” (Matthew 18:6)

The Church, above all institutions, is called to welcome and nurture children. Our goal is to maintain a safe, secure, loving place where children may grow and where those who care for them may administer to their needs in responsible ways. As caring Christians, we are committed to protect and serve as advocates for children and youth participating in the life of our church. The policy and procedures set forth below will apply to all people who provide supervision or have custody of children, or who have opportunity to have contact with children in church facilities or church sponsored activities.(Excerpts from The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church: 1996 by the United Methodist Publishing House).

Screening and Supervision Procedures

All persons who intend to work with children and youth at Forest Hill UMC must be properly screened, and all screening documents are to be kept on file in a secure location.

Those working with youth and children should:

- Complete a Safe Sanctuary Covenant Statement
- Complete an Authorization and Request for Criminal Records Check Form

Church Staff completes background check

Education and Training

In an effort to successfully implement the policies and procedures to reduce the risk of child abuse, an ongoing program for education and training is essential.

- All new employees and new volunteers shall attend a training session or review of this policy with a staff member prior to working with our youth/children.
- An annual Covenant Renewal and training session will be offered for all staff and volunteers.

All meetings of children/youth shall be governed by these guidelines:

1. "Rule of two": When possible a minimum of two persons should be present for any church sponsored program or event involving children/youth. If the "Rule of Two" is not possible, the door to the classroom must remain open or have a glass panel. In no instance should the "Rule of Two" include persons of the same immediate family, but in the event of an emergency, the rules for one teacher should be followed.
2. Restroom policy: We encourage a parent or guardian to escort their children to the restroom. When a parent or guardian is not available, volunteers working with an individual needing assistance should remain visible either outside of the restroom or with the stall door remaining open.
3. All children and youth participating in out-of-town and overnight outings must have written consent and completed medical release forms. There must be access to a phone when groups are away from the church property. One adult will never take a child or children on an overnight outing alone. Medical release and consent forms may be completed for a one-year period and must be renewed annually.
4. Unauthorized visitors will not be allowed to remain with the group.
5. Children in 3rd Grade and under shall not be permitted to leave their designated meeting area without adult supervision.
6. "The Buddy System": We encourage parents, teachers and leaders of anyone under the age of 18 to make sure the children or youth have a "buddy" who is close to their age so that no child is ever alone while in the church building, or while on any activity, trip, or overnight.
7. Volunteers or paid staff will not date or have romantic involvement with a minor.
8. When on trips, adults shall not share a bed with a child unless the child is their own.
9. No one under the age of 18 should be given supervisory capacity and should be at least five years older than those being supervised. Youth can participate in children's activities as "assistants".

Discipline

Corporal punishment will never be used for any reason. No individual is to spank, hit, or shake a child or youth. Positive discipline measures will be used to redirect and guide a child/youth's behavior.

Techniques of behavior management to use will include the following:

1. Positive reinforcement
2. Redirecting student to other areas of the room or to new activities
3. Time out
4. Removal from the classroom/activity area and taken to the parent(s) or appropriate ministry leader.

Social Media

Photos may be posted to FHUMC and related Facebook pages by page administrators. Guardians must be given the opportunity to decline photo posting on social and print media. Any publication shared on social media or online medium must not include last names of minors. Individuals, including minors, are welcome to identify (“tag”) themselves.

When “checking in” to a location on social media, only “check in” yourself. Never “check in” minors. Be sensitive to tagging or revealing other participants’ location without their expressed permission.

Safe Sanctuary Volunteer/Employee Covenant Statement

The congregation of Forest Hill UMC is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, adults, volunteers and employees who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the church. The following policy statements reflect our congregation’s commitment to preserving this church as a holy place of safety and protection for all who would enter.

1. No adult who has been convicted of, participated in, pleaded guilty of, or no contest to child abuse (sexual, physical, or emotional) should volunteer to work with children or youth in any church-sponsored activity.
2. All adult volunteers involved with children and/or youth must be members or regular attendees for at least six months before being assigned as a volunteer supervisor.
3. Adults who volunteer or work with children and/or youth shall observe the “Rule of Two” so that no adult is ever alone with children or youth.
4. Adults who volunteer or work with children and/or youth should attend regular training and educational events when provided by the church to keep volunteers informed of church policies and state laws regarding child abuse.
5. Adult volunteers and employees shall immediately report to their supervisor any behavior that seems abusive or inappropriate.

I have read this Volunteer/Employee Covenant Statement, and I agree to abide by all the policies set forth herein.

Signature of Applicant

Print full name

Date

Authorization and Request for Criminal Records Check

I, _____, hereby authorize Forest Hill United Methodist Church to request any Police Department or agency to release information regarding any record of charges or convictions contained in files, or in any criminal file maintained on me, whether said file is a local, state or national file, and including but not limited to accusations and convictions for crimes committed against minors, to the fullest extent permitted by state and federal law. I release said Police Department or agency from all liability that may result from any such disclosure made in response to this request.

Signature of Applicant Date

Print applicants full name:

Print all other names that have been used by applicant (if any):

Social Security Number: _____ Date of Birth: _____

Current Address:

In the space provided, please identify any criminal convictions apart from minor traffic violations:

Employees: Please return this form to the Senior Pastor of Forest Hill UMC.
Volunteers: Please return this form to the Director of Children & Youth Ministries.

Consent to Transport Minors; Waiver and Release of All Claims

Person to be Transported

Name: _____ **Date of Birth:** _____

Address: _____

City: _____ **State:** _____ **Zip Code:** _____

Home Phone # _____ **Mobile Phone #** _____

Parent or Guardian: _____

Parent or Guardian Phone #: _____ **Alternate Phone #:** _____

Emergency contact other than Parent or Guardian:

Name: _____

Relationship: _____ **Phone #:** _____

Transportation Waiver and Release

I, the undersigned, give my consent for the person identified above to be transported by Forest Hill United Methodist Church and will assume all liability for my/their participation in this activity/event and any injury that may result during the transport or at the event/activity. Further, by signing below:

1. I will not hold Forest Hill United Methodist Church , its officers, agents, employees, assigns or anyone acting on its behalf, responsible or liable for injury occurring to the named person in the course of such activities or such travel.
2. I hereby accept financial responsibility for personal items lost by the person identified herein.
3. I authorize Forest Hill United Methodist Church to transport and to obtain, through a physician of its own choice, any emergency medical care that may become reasonably necessary for the person in the course of such activities/ events or such travel, and agree to accept the cost of the transportation and/or treatment by medical personnel or facility.
4. I accept full responsibility and hereby grant permission for me or my minor child to travel with Forest Hill United Methodist Church.

PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS FORM IS VALID FOR THE ENTIRE PROGRAM YEAR – AUGUST THROUGH JULY.

Signature _____ **Print Name/Relationship** _____ **Date** _____

