

# **ALDRSGATE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

## **Child and Youth Protection Policy**

### **I. Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of Aldersgate's Child and Youth Protection Policy is to (1) provide a caring and secure environment for the children and youth of our community in all activities at or sponsored by Aldersgate United Methodist Church (hereafter referred to as Aldersgate Church) (2) provide guidelines for the early detection of instances of child abuse as well as the protection of staff and volunteers at Aldersgate Church against false charges of child abuse and (3) to establish guidelines for compliance with Virginia State Law on child abuse and the Virginia United Methodist Conference Child/Youth Protection Guidelines.

### **II. Biblical Foundation**

In Mark 10:14, Jesus says, "Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God." In accordance with this mandate, Aldersgate Church seeks to provide a caring community that prevents abuse in any form to children and youth and to be in ministry to families where abuse may occur.

### **III. Applicability**

This policy applies to all users of Aldersgate Church facilities and to any church-sponsored activities off church property. This includes, but is not limited to Sunday school, Youth programs, Day School, Scouts, Choirs, Theater and Childcare. Church facilities will not be available to outside groups (who will have children in the building during activities) whose leaders refuse to read, sign, and follow this policy.

### **IV. Specific Guidelines for a Safe Environment**

#### **a. Two Adult and "3 Deep" Rule**

For activities involving children from birth through 5<sup>th</sup> grade, two adults or one adult and one approved teenager (approved by the Children's Ministries Director) will be present at all church sponsored activities, on or off church premises. The one exception is that Senior High youth who are a part of Aldersgate's Youth Program, are recommended by their parent/guardian, and have completed the Child and Youth Protection Policy Training may volunteer in a classroom and serve as the second adult for church activities on church grounds. For children in grades 7 – 12, there must be at least three unrelated persons available for every church sponsored activity (e.g. one adult and two or more youth or a married couple and two or more youth.) Group size may dictate additional supervision to maintain an appropriate ratio of adults to children. At a minimum, there should be one additional adult for every 15 additional children over and above the first 25 children. One-on-one meetings of a child/youth with a staff member should take place in a public setting (e.g. the church, a library or a restaurant). One-on-one meetings with a church volunteer may occur only with the prior written consent of the child/youth's parent/guardian and should also occur in a public setting.

#### **b. Overnight Stays**

If an activity with children or youth involves an overnight stay, two or more adult leaders must be present and if the group is mixed gender there must be four adults with at least two males and two females.

### **c. Six Month Rule**

For a volunteer's first six months of service at Aldersgate, program leaders will attempt to pair all new volunteer workers with someone who has been with the congregation for at least one year and who has a prior relationship with the children and youth. Typically, volunteers will have been a member/active constituent for six months at Aldersgate prior to being put in a leadership position with children or youth. If an exception to this rule appears to be in the best interest of the church, then approval of the Senior or Associate pastor is required.

### **d. Screening and Training of Staff and Volunteer Workers**

All volunteers and staff who work with children and youth at Aldersgate for any duration of time must receive a copy of the Child and Youth Protection Policy, and complete and sign the "Information Form and Agreement for Workers in Children's and Youth Ministries." References will be checked by the appropriate staff member by telephone, email, or letter asking the question: "Do you know any reason why this person would not be suitable for working with children or youth?"

All volunteers and staff working with children or youth must attend a training session on the Child and Youth Protection Policy. Child and Youth Protection Policy Training will be offered once per year, and all volunteers must renew their training at least every 5 years, and when changes are made to the policy. The policy will be reviewed at least every two years by the Church Council, making revisions as needed.

Volunteers and staff who work with children and youth for an extended period of time, including any overnight stay or a year-long commitment such as a Sunday School or youth group volunteer, must complete a Permission to Obtain Background Check form. The church Executive Director will submit the background check information to a private organization to be processed through a secure website and will receive and maintain the results. Should the background check results identify some type of offense the church Executive Director will consult with the Senior Pastor (and the staff program leader if necessary) to determine the volunteers' eligibility to work with children and youth. Background screenings will be reaffirmed annually by simple notarized statement and signature for the first two years. A background check must be run again once the original report is 3 years old and every 3 years thereafter, as long as the volunteer continues to work with children or youth.

### **e. Childcare**

All childcare workers will have on file a signed "Information Form and Agreement for Workers in Children's and Youth Ministries," copy of their driver's license, and a completed background check. Childcare will be provided by two adults or one adult and an approved teenager. For off-site events (e.g. Wesley Groups or UMW circles) it is the responsibility of the homeowner to procure the necessary arrangements and to have proper parental permission. Any event of childcare provided at the church when the parents will be leaving church property requires the approval of a member of the Education staff, and there must be an Emergency Form filled out for each child, including emergency contact information, pertinent medical history and insurance information.

#### **f. Off-Site Activities and Transportation**

For any church sponsored event that a child/youth will be off church property, a parental permission form including emergency contact information, pertinent medical history and insurance information must be completed for each child and be in the hands of the staff member or volunteer chaperoning the child/youth.

When children or youth are being transported to an event, the staff person or adult leader is expected to travel as a part of the group. When only one vehicle is being used to transport children, two adults must be in the vehicle. However, if more than one vehicle is used, they must travel together, and only one adult is required in each vehicle. Youth are not to drive other youth to an off-site event except when the other youth is a sibling. For all off-site overnight activities, a roster of the youth or children participating in the activity must be given to the church office prior to the event. A parental permission form for each child should be in the vehicle in which that participant is being transported.

All vehicles must have a current registration and inspections, and the driver must have a current driver's license and not have been convicted of a felony driving offense in the past 5 years.

#### **g. Precautionary Measures**

Other precautionary measures include, but are not limited to: parental access to programs, Facility Use Guidelines for visiting groups, and windows in the doors of all classrooms and space where children and youth meet. Education about child abuse is provided and made available to the congregation at large, regardless of volunteer area.

#### **h. Classroom Discipline**

Aldersgate Church ascribes to a positive approach to discipline. If a child is behaving inappropriately, the teacher or worker will state the expected behavior and tell the child specifically what he/she is doing that is not acceptable. If inappropriate behavior continues, the child may be placed at a table to work alone. If the disruptive behavior continues, the child will be taken to the appropriate staff person and if necessary the child's parents will be asked to come and get the child. If removal from the program becomes necessary, the situation will be discussed with the child's parent/guardian as soon as possible to establish the changes that must be made for continued participation in the program.

#### **i. Bathroom Policy**

Day school classes will be taken to the bathroom as a group, with the teacher or leader standing outside, unless an emergency situation requires the teachers' assistance in the bathroom. The 3 and 4 year old Sunday School class teachers may take individual children to the bathroom when needed and should remain outside of the bathroom when possible. Elementary students may go to the bathroom in pairs. Volunteers should check on the children if they do not return promptly.

#### **j. Classroom and Event Release Procedures**

Elementary children in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade and under will not be released to the building-at-large. Sunday school children in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade (Tribe Time) will be released with written permission from their parent. A designated and responsible party must receive the child from the teacher or supervisor.

Elementary children in the 4th grade and above may be sent on errands in pairs to a specific area of the church (e.g. the kitchen, sanctuary or resource room). Children in 6<sup>th</sup> grade may be released at the close of an event to wait in a specified area for pick up. Youth in grades 7-12 may be released from an activity at the close of the event unless other arrangements have been made with parent/guardian for early dismissal. Youth in grades 7-12 may pick up younger siblings when the parent/guardian has provided written notification (one note for the year) to the teacher.

## **V. Reporting Suspected Child Abuse**

Reporting suspected child abuse is governed by State Law, and any suspected abuse must be reported directly to the Virginia Department of Social Services (540-347-6300) or Fairfax County Child Protective Services (703-324-7400) and the Virginia Child Abuse Hotline (800-552-7096).

We take every allegation of child abuse seriously.

All procedures observed in handling the allegation must be documented.

Documentation should include the time and date of the contact, the name and phone number of the person contacted and a brief summary of the conversation.

Report the allegation to the above listed state/county offices.

Report the allegation to the District Superintendent (703-820-7200).

Notify the Senior Pastor (703-765-6555) who will contact the church insurance carrier and legal counsel, if necessary.

The victim's parent will be notified if it is not known that they have previous knowledge of the alleged incident and are not suspected themselves.

Any worker or volunteer accused of abuse should report the incident to his/her supervisor or ministry staff person.

## **VI. Follow-up Response**

Pray for the church and all persons affected by the allegation.

Do not confront the accused with the allegation. If the accused has assigned church duties with children or youth, that person will be relieved temporarily of his/her duties until the investigation is concluded. If the person is a paid employee, the question of continuing or suspending compensation during the investigation should be addressed by the Staff Parish Relations Committee.

The pastor will extend pastoral care and resources to the alleged victim and accused and their families.

Observe complete confidentiality for both the alleged victim and the accused.

## **VII. Definitions of Child Abuse**

The following definitions and explanations are from the Virginia Department of Social Services.

I. Physical Abuse A physical injury, threat of injury or creation of a real and significant danger of substantial risk of death, disfigurement, or impairment of bodily functions. Such injury or threat of injury, regardless of intent, is inflicted or allowed to be inflicted by non-accidental means. Examples: asphyxiation; bone fracture; brain damage; skull fracture; subdural hematoma; burns, scalding, cuts, bruises, welts, abrasions; internal injuries; poisoning; sprains; dislocations; gunshot; stabbing wounds.

II. Physical Neglect The failure to provide food, clothing, shelter, or supervision for a child if the child's health or safety is endangered. Physical neglect may include multiple occurrences or a one-time critical or severe event that results in a threat to health or safety, such as a toddler left alone. Other types of physical neglect include abandonment, inadequate supervision, inadequate clothing, inadequate shelter, inadequate personal hygiene, inadequate food and malnutrition.

III. Sexual Abuse Any sexual contact between a child or teenager and an adult or significantly older, more powerful person for the sexual gratification of the older person. In addition to sexual contact, abuse can include other exploitative behaviors such as inappropriate verbal stimulation of a child or teenager, taking or showing sexually explicit photographs of or to a child or teenager or exposing a child or teenager to pornography or adult sexual activity.

Medical Neglect Refusal or failure by 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.

Mental Abuse/ Neglect A pattern of acts or omissions by the caretaker which result in harm to a child's psychological or emotional health or development.

VI. Educational Neglect The child's caregiver is directly responsibly for the failure of the child to attend school or an approved alternative program of study.

VII. Bizarre Discipline Any actions in which the caretaker uses eccentric, irrational or grossly inappropriate procedures or devices to modify the child's behavior.

# Information Form and Agreement for Workers in Children's and Youth Ministries

Name LAST FIRST MIDDLE \_\_\_\_\_

Current Address \_\_\_\_\_ City  
\_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Home

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Cell Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Driver's

license # \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ List past two previous churches where you  
have been a member: \_\_\_\_\_

List previous activities involving working with youth or children: \_\_\_\_\_

If you will be transporting children or youth from the church premises, have you been convicted of a felony driving offense, to include driving under the influence (DUI) and/or reckless driving, during the last five years?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever abused a minor or engaged in any other conduct that could be regarded as corrupting the morals of a minor, "including, but not limited to murder, abduction for immoral purposes, sexual assault, failing to secure medical attention for an injured child, pandering, crimes against nature involving children, taking indecent liberties with children, neglect of children or obscenity offenses?" Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever been convicted or pled guilty or are charges pending concerning a crime or misdemeanor of child abuse or a crime involving actual or attempted sexual molestation of a minor? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

List two personal references: (not former employers or relatives)

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Organization \_\_\_\_\_ email \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Organization \_\_\_\_\_ email \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

I have read and understand Aldersgate United Methodist Church's Child and Youth Protection Policy and agree to abide by it. I authorize and release any references listed to give any information (including opinions) that they may have regarding my work with children or youth.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

# Permission to Obtain a Background Check

(This form authorizes the church to obtain background information and must be completed by the applicant.  
The church must keep this completed form on file for at least two years after requesting a background check.)

I, the undersigned applicant (also known as "consumer"), authorize \_\_\_\_\_ through  
*insert church name*  
its independent contractor, LexisNexis, to procure background information (also known as a "consumer report and/or investigative consumer report") about me. This report may include my driving history, including any traffic citations; a social security number verification; present and former addresses; criminal and civil history/records; and the state sex offender records.

I understand that I am entitled to a complete copy of any background information report of which I am the subject upon my request to \_\_\_\_\_, if such is made within a reasonable time from the date it was produced.  
*insert church name*

also understand that I may receive a written summary of my rights under the Fair Credit Reporting Act.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Identifying Information for Background Information Agency (also known as "Consumer Reporting Agency")

Print Name:

\_\_\_\_\_

First	Middle	Last
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Other Names Used (alias, maiden, nickname):

\_\_\_\_\_

Current Address:

\_\_\_\_\_

Street /P. O. Box	City	State	Zip Code	County	Dates
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Former Address:

\_\_\_\_\_

Street /P. O. Box	City	State	Zip Code	County	Dates
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Social Security Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Daytime Telephone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Driver's License Number: \_\_\_\_\_ State of Issuance: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender \_\_\_\_\_

Name on Drivers License \_\_\_\_\_

If you have not held a Driver's License from this state for 5 or more years, please provide info on previous Driver's License