

ALDRERSGATE 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 5th grade, two unrelated 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 teenage volunteers there must be at least a 5-year age gap between the volunteer and the child.

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. Open Door/Window Policy

All rooms where children and youth activities take place must have a window through a door or into the room that allows for clear visibility of activity. If a room does not have an adequate window or visibility, doors must be left open in order to maintain visibility. In the event when the two adult and 3 deep rule is not available, an open door must be left open to maintain visibility. Additionally, a Rover may be utilized to walk the property during events- they should check restrooms and other spaces inside or outside where a vulnerable person could be at risk. Rovers are also a great resource when children are separated from their parents.

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c. Children Drop Off/Pick Up Policy

Parents/Guardians of children ages Birth-6th grade are expected to visit the Kids Check-In desk to register or check-in child, and then escort children to appropriate classrooms. Parents/Guardians will receive a parent tag with a unique number identifier that matches the child's tag number.

Parents/Guardians are required to bring their printed parent tag to classrooms when picking up a child. Teachers will match the parent tag number with the child's tag number to ensure they are the responsible party to pick up the child. If no tag is presented, teachers will not release the child from their classroom, until the Children's Director has been notified.

Children leaving the property must leave the parking lot in a child seat with appropriate equipment and a properly enclosed, road-legal vehicle. Proper safety must also be maintained on scooters, bicycles, wagons, or any other mode of transportation for children.

d. 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.

e. 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 with references from their previous church needed.

f. Classroom Ratios

For children ages zero to 16 months, there should be two volunteers for every 4 children.

For children ages 16 months to 24 months, there should be two volunteers for every 5 children.

For children ages 24 months to 36 months, there should be two volunteers for every 8 children.

For children ages 36 months to 5 years, there should be two volunteers for every 10 children.

For children ages 5 years to 9 years, there should be two volunteers for every 20 children.

For children ages 9 to 12 years, there should be two volunteers for every 25 children.

When a group of children in the classroom includes children of different age brackets, the age of the youngest child in the group shall be used to determine the adult-to-children ratio that applies to that group.

g. 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 3 years, and when changes are made to the policy.

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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.

h. 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.

i. 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.

j. 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.

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k. 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. After the first disciplinary communication is made, this should be immediately shared with the supervisory staff person and, if necessary, the guardians of the child.

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.

l. 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.

m. Classroom and Event Release Procedures

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

n. Digital Ministry Policy

Individuals should not contact youth and children directly without including another adult (staff person, pastor, or parent) on the message. If a child or youth texts an adult leader, that leader should respond by including a parent or staff member in their text message. If a leader receives a text message from a child/youth asking for help, the leader should contact the program director and pastoral staff to determine the appropriate response. Training will be provided to help leaders understand how best to respond in different scenarios.

Contacting children should/youth only occur during 9:00 am-9:00 pm.

Pictures of children should not be posted online without the consent of parents.

Pictures of children in swimsuits is never appropriate to post.

o. Gift Policy

No gifts \$10 and over should be given to children or youth without the knowledge of the parents and the staff supervisor. This does not include donations toward sponsoring children or youth for church events. Donations toward sponsoring children or youth should all be directed through the church and not given directly to those being sponsored.

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p. Annual Training Plan

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 3 years, and when changes are made to the policy. Background checks should be reviewed at the same rate.

The training should occur around or prior to August when new activities for children and youth begin. The training will be conducted by a pastor, Director of Children's Ministry, or Director of Youth Ministry. The training will discuss what worked and what didn't work over the past year in regards to your policy. Go over scenarios and role-play how volunteers would respond.

Video and in-person resources may be utilized to complete the training. One video resource may include: <https://www.churchlawandtax.com/training/>

A spreadsheet should be maintained jointly by the Director of Children's Ministry, Director of Youth Ministry, and the Executive Director of who has been trained, when they have been trained, and when renewal should occur.

q. Safe Sanctuary Policy Updates and Accountability

The policy will be updated by staff on a yearly basis in conjunction with the SPRC. The SPRC will have ultimate authority to approve the policy and will ensure that adequate training is conducted.

Elementary children in the 4th grade and above may be sent on errands, in pairs, to a specified area of the church (e.g. the kitchen, sanctuary or resource room). Children in 6th 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). **All individuals on staff or who volunteer with children or youth are considered mandatory reporters by Virginia.**

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 appropriate supervisory staff and pastors.

Report the allegation to the above listed state/county offices. Pastor(s) will sit with the reporter during the call for support and prayerful presence.

Pastors will report the allegation to the District Superintendent (703-820-7200).

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.

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VI. Follow-up Response & Reporting

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 victims and the accused.

VII. Definitions of Child Abuse

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

A. 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.

B. 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.

C. 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.

D. 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.

E. 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.

F. Educational Neglect

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

G. Bizarre Discipline

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

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VIII. For Domestic Abuse Cases

A protective order is a legal document issued by a judge or magistrate to protect the health and safety of a person who is alleged to be a victim of any act involving violence, force, or threat that results in bodily injury or places that person in fear of death, sexual assault or bodily injury. Protective orders prohibit all contact by the respondent with the victim or the victim's family/household members.

Virginia has three types of protective orders:

A. Emergency Protective Order (EPO):

Expires at the end of the third day following issuance or the next day court is in session, whichever is later.

B. Preliminary Protective Order (PPO):

Lasts 15 days or until a full hearing

C. Protective Order (PO):

May last up to two years. A PO can provide for temporary custody or visitation of a minor child.

IX. Sex Offenders as Members of God's Kingdom

Regarding violence and abuse, the Social Principles of the United Methodist Church indicate that: "... violence and abuse in all its forms - verbal, psychological, physical, sexual-is detrimental to the covenant of the human community. We encourage the Church to provide a safe environment, counsel, and support for the victim. While we deplore the actions of the abuser, we affirm that person to be in need of God's redeeming love."

In order to create a safe environment for all individuals attending Aldersgate UMC and its programs, conditions must be placed on a convicted sex offender's participation in the life of the church. Such conditions must be faithfully carried out so as to remain true adherents to the Social Principle indicated above.

One of the ways that humans experience God's redeeming love is through Christian fellowship. Thus, the following actions should be considered when engaging with known convicted sex offenders wishing to be a part of the faith community:

A. Intentional Discussion:

Discussions could be held within the Leadership Team and Pastoral Staff. Such discussions might include:

1. Ways to effectively incorporate convicted sex offenders into the life of the church without endangering children and youth
2. Requirement of participation in a professional counseling program for the individual for the entire time of membership
3. Areas of the church that are "off-limits" to the individual
4. Restrictions on leadership in or on behalf of the church

B. Covenant Establishment:

A mutually agreed upon covenant could be established detailing the results of the intentional discussions above. The covenant might also include a description of a "covenant partner" group that will accompany the individual while on church property, the strict policy that the individual is to have no role in the church that includes contact with children and youth, and any additional conditions that are deemed necessary for presence or participation. This covenant would be signed by the offender, pastor(s), and chairperson of the Leadership Team. Although this situation should be handled with discretion, the covenant should not be secret. Monitoring the covenant should be the responsibility of all, not just the aforementioned signers.

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they may have regarding my work with children or youth.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

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Accident/Incident Report Form

*(Please print all information within **24 hours** of incident and return to Director or Pastoral Staff)*

Date of incident: _____ Time of incident: _____

Name of injured: _____ Age: _____

Address of injured: _____

Location of Incident: _____

Parent or guardian *(if applicable)*: _____

Name of person(s) who witnessed the incident: _____

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Describe incident (use attachment if necessary):

Local Law Enforcement called/notified: Yes _____ No _____ Time: _____

Police Incident Number: _____

Signature of Incident Reporter Date

Printed Name of Incident Reporter

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Report of Suspected Incident of Child/Youth Abuse

(Please print all information within **24 hours** of incident and return to Director or Pastoral Staff)

1. Name of worker (paid or volunteer) observing or receiving disclosure of child abuse:

2. Victim's name: _____

Victim's age/date of birth: _____

3. Date/place of initial conversation with/report from victim:

4. Victim's statement (use attachment if necessary):

5. Name of person accused of abuse: _____

6. Reported to Supervisor/Director: _____

Date/time: _____

Summary (use attachment if necessary):

Director Signature: _____

6. Reported to Pastor: _____

Date/time: _____

Summary:

Pastor Signature: _____

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7. Call to Victim's parent/guardian

Date/time: _____

Spoke with: _____

Summary:

8. Call to local children and family service agency:

Fairfax Child Protective Services: 703-324-7400

Date/time: _____

Spoke with: _____

Summary:

9. Call to local law enforcement agency (call 911):

Date/time: _____

Spoke with: _____

Summary:

Sign/Print name: _____ Date: _____

Copies of this report sent/given to: _____

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Appendix A

Tools for Assessing the Risk/Reducing the Risk

Three areas must be considered when assessing the potential risk of a given situation. Volunteers and paid staff will consider these three areas during the planning of and during actual events that involve children and youth.

1. Degree of Accountability: Assess the degree of accountability.
 - Have adult leaders for this activity completed the screening process?
 - Have adult leaders for this activity signed a church and youth leader application?
 - Have adult leaders for this activity completed Safe Sanctuaries training?
 - Is the two-Adult Rule and/or Open Visibility Rule being maintained during this activity?
 - If the activity is off church grounds, has parental consent been obtained from all participants?
 - When accountability increases, risk decreases. When accountability decreases, risk increases.
2. Degree of isolation: Assess the degree of isolation.
 - Is this an overnight activity? (If yes, the opportunity for isolation increases.)
 - Is this activity taking place off-grounds?
 - Is this activity taking place in remote buildings or in classrooms that are isolated?
 - Will adult volunteers or paid staff ever be alone with a child or youth during this activity? (In a car, etc.)
 - Will a youth ever be alone with another youth or child, or will a child ever be left alone with a child?
 - When isolation increases, risk increases. When isolation decreases, risk decreases
3. Degree of balance of power: Assess the degree of balance of power.
 - Will adult volunteers or paid staff ever be alone with a child or youth during this activity? (For instance, in a car, etc.)
 - Will an older, bigger, stronger or more "popular" youth or child ever be alone with another youth or child that is younger, weaker, and less "popular"?
 - Will children of the same age be able to "buddy" each other to the bathroom etc.? This is preferred over having an older child escort a younger child. When there is a balance of power, risk decreases. When there is an imbalance of power, risk increases.

Low-risk situations include:

- Activities where a group of children or youth are present for an activity (such as Christian Education classes, Bible study, etc.)
- Where the activity takes place on church grounds during daylight hours
- Where open visibility into a classroom situation is maintained at all times
- Where floaters/hall monitors are present during the activity
- In all settings it is always preferable to have two adults. However, in a low-risk setting it is permissible for only one adult to be present as long as all other criteria are strictly maintained.

High-risk situations include:

- Activities where one or fewer children or youth are present for an activity with one adult and the opportunity for one-to-one interaction between adult and youth/child is high, OR

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- Where a large group of children or youth are present, but the activity is spread out across an area to such an extent that children and youth cannot be adequately supervised by adults
- Where the activity is an overnight activity
- Where the activity takes place off church grounds
- Where visibility is limited due to isolation are deemed high potential risk situations.

Volunteers and paid staff should recognize these situations as potentially high risk and take steps to reduce the risk to themselves and to children and youth. These steps may include: increasing the number of participants or adults present, changing the venue for the activity to a less remote location, or moving the activity to the grounds, or changing the time of the activity. If the risk cannot be reduced, the activity should be canceled.