

Child Protection Policy and Procedures

– for –

Great Bridge United Methodist Church

201 Stadium Drive
Chesapeake, VA 23322
757-482-1049

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I. Children and Youth Ministries Mission Statement

Great Bridge United Methodist Church (GBUMC) strives to provide a safe, spiritual home in which each young person:

- Comes to know Christ personally
- Experiences the joy of the Lord
- Develops a strong, Christian foundation with the objective of inspiring life-long growth in the young person's walk with Christ and a strong relationship with the Church.

II. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to help GBUMC provide a caring and secure environment for children and youth in all phases of church life.

III. Biblical Foundation

GBUMC seeks to express God's love of children and provide for their personal wholeness. This caring community seeks to prevent child abuse in any form to our children and youth and to be in ministry to families where abuse may occur. Scripture, tradition, experience and reason are the foundations of our understanding upon which all policies, procedures and ministries must stand.

And they were bringing children to him, that He might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it He was indignant, and said to them, "Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it" And He took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands upon them.

Mark 20:13-16

Jesus teaches us explicitly that children have the right and the keys to the kingdom of God. Our goal in response to this Biblical mandate is to maintain a safe, secure and loving place where children and youth may grow and where caregivers, teachers and leaders (both paid & volunteer) minister appropriately to their needs. GBUMC seeks to prevent any form of child abuse to our children and youth, and be in ministry to families where abuse or neglect may occur.

IV. Virginia's Child Abuse Law

Under Code of Virginia § 63.2-100, an abused child is defined as one who is less than eighteen years of age, whose parents or other persons responsible for his/her care creates or inflicts, or threatens to create or inflict, or allows to be created or inflicted upon such a child a physical or mental injury by other than accidental means, or creates a substantial risk of death or disfigurement or impairment of bodily or mental functions.

This includes the following: failure to provide care necessary for health, abandonment, commission or allowance of sexual exploitation, endangerment or neglect. Child abuse

may be physical, sexual, emotional or mental and may be the result of actions or omissions to act (e.g., lack of care for a child).

Code of Virginia § 63.2-1509 states that, “Any person licensed to practice medicine or any of the healing arts, any hospital resident or intern, any person employed in the nursing profession, any persons employed as a social worker, any probation officer, any teacher or other person employed in a public or private school, kindergarten or nursery school, any person providing full-time or part-time child care for pay on a regularly planned basis...any person associated with or employed by any private organization responsible for the care, custody or control of children” who has reason to suspect that a child is abused or neglected shall report the matter immediately to the local department of the county or city wherein the child resides or wherein the abuse or neglect is believed to have occurred, or to the Department of Social Services’ toll free child abuse and neglect hotline.

In addition, everyone should report any known or reasonably suspected child abuse immediately. Any report is confidential and the person making the report is immune from liability for making such a report, unless it is proven that such a person acted in bad faith or with malicious intent.

V. Protective Orders

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.

In Virginia, there are three types of protective orders:

- 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.
- Preliminary Protective Order (PPO): Lasts 15 days or until a full hearing
- Protective Order (PO): May last up to two years. A PO can provide for temporary custody or visitation of a minor child.

In Cases of Suspected Child Abuse:

If a court should issue a child protective order, or orders removing the child from the parent or guardian, a PPO may be filed and the child may be removed from the home. The PPO may require the parent or custodian to do certain things (ie: improve hygiene, provide appropriate housing, get medical attention, or refrain from certain offensive behavior such as physical discipline or exposing the child to inappropriate activity). When the child is in imminent danger, an emergency removal order will be issued. After a hearing, whether or not the court decides that a child is neglected or abused, the child may remain in temporary foster care and certain services will be ordered. Parents may be required to participate in specific programs designed to remedy the situation that led to removal.

What does this mean for GBUMC?

If a staff member, volunteer, or any other individual responsible for the well-being of a minor is made aware of a protective order violation, they are to call the authorities immediately. Do not release the child into the custody of an individual in violation of a protective order.

VI. Types of Child Abuse

A. Definition

Child abuse refers to an act committed by a parent, caregiver or person in a position of trust (even though he/she may not care for the child on a daily basis) which is not accidental, and which harms or threatens to harm a child's physical or mental health or welfare. The following definitions and explanations in this section are from the Virginia Department of Social Services.

B. Types & Warning Signs of Abuse

1. 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, bruised, welts, abrasion; internal injuries, poisoning; sprains, dislocations; gunshot, stabbing wounds. The sale of drugs by a caretaker in the presence of a child is also regarded as physical abuse due to the potential danger of such a transaction, as well as the harmful toxins found in the manufacture of drugs.

Warning Signs:

- Questionable bruises on soft tissue of the body including those on face, torso, back, buttocks, and thighs.
- Bruises, welts, cuts or human bite marks in various stages of healing and clustered together or reflecting the shape of the article used to inflict the injury.
- Questionable burn marks, especially on the soles, palms, back or buttocks including cigarette burns, rope burns, immersion burns, burns that are patterned.
- Questionable fractures (multiple or spiral fractures especially), lacerations or abrasions in various stages of healing.

2. Physical Neglect

Neglect cases make up over 56% of all reports of child maltreatment in Virginia. The failure to provide food, clothing, shelter or supervision for a child if the child's health or safety is endangered. Abandonment, lack of supervision including knowingly leaving a child alone with a convicted sex offender (who is not related by blood or marriage to the child), lack of adequate bathing and good hygiene, lack of adequate nutrition, lack of adequate shelter, and lack of medical or dental care are all examples of physical neglect. Physical neglect may also include multiple occurrences of a one-time critical or severe event that results in a threat to health or safety, such as a toddler left alone.

Warning Signs:

- Child looks undernourished and is usually hungry. Child may steal food or hoard food.
- Child is often lethargic, as if the child has not slept well
- Child has untreated injuries or maladies, like a badly infected cut or toothache
- Chronically has injuries that you can attribute to lack of supervision, including being harmed by others
- Child may be inappropriately dressed for the weather or may have noticeably poor hygiene
- Child has many absences from school and is frequently tardy

3. Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse comprises a range of inappropriate sexual behaviors a caregiver may perpetrate on a child. Examples of such abuse are: sexual exploitation (such as child prostitution or pornography), sexual molestation, intercourse/sodomy, incest, rape, indecent exposure, fondling, and other sexual abuses. While physical indicators of this type of abuse may not be easily identified, behavioral indicators usually manifest to easy identification.

Warning Signs:

- Expressions of age-inappropriate knowledge of sex and sexually “pseudo-mature” behaviors
- Sexually explicit drawings
- Highly sexualized play
- Expressions of explained fear of a person or place
- Avoiding or attempting to avoid a familiar adult
- Signs of posttraumatic stress disorder
- Nightmares or sleep interruptions
- A child’s statement. When a child says that they have been sexually abused take the statement seriously. Resolve doubt in favor of the child, and err on the side of protection.
- Low self-image, low self-confidence, guilt (“my fault” mentality), shame, depression, mood swings, anxiety

4. Mental Abuse/Neglect (Emotional Maltreatment)

A pattern of acts or omissions by the caretaker, which result in harm to a child’s psychological or emotional health or development. Examples of such abuse are: ridicule, rejection, intimidation, ignoring a child, indifference, withholding love, seeming unconcerned about a child’s problems, holding impossible expectations without regard to developmental capability, and bizarre discipline.

Warning Signs:

- Non-organic failure to thrive (infants)-Characterized by growth failure, signs of severe malnutrition, and variable degrees of developmental retardation.

- Speech disorders or developmental delays
- Habit disorders (sucking, biting, rocking)
- Conduct disorders (antisocial, destructive)
- Neurotic traits (sleep disorders, inhibition of play)
- Behavioral extremes (compliant, passive, undemanding, aggressive, demanding, raging)
- Overly adaptive behavior (inappropriately adult, inappropriately infantile and needy)
- Self-destructive behavior and suicide attempts
- Cruelty: seemingly taking pleasure in hurting other people or animals

VII. Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse

In an effort to create the safest possible environment within GBUMC, the following abuse prevention measures will be utilized:

A. Screening of Volunteers and Staff

The screening process described below applies to any member of the church (paid or unpaid, clergy or lay) who will be involved in work with children and youth. Screening is the first step towards the creation of a safe and nurturing environment for both children and volunteers.

Any volunteer serving in a leadership capacity to children or youth must have had continuous active involvement in the church for at least 6 months. This requirement may be waived if a person transfers from another church and provides references to the appropriate staff member. The verification of these references must be documented before allowing the person to begin to work independently with children or youth at GBUMC.

Before beginning the first year of service, each employee or volunteer children's teacher, child care worker, youth worker or chaperone will be asked to sign a statement indicating that he/she has never been convicted of child abuse or neglect nor is the subject of any pending criminal charges within or outside the Commonwealth of Virginia, nor had a founded complaint of child abuse or neglect made against them. [see: Child Protection Acknowledgement]

All volunteers and paid staff serving in a leadership capacity to children or youth under the age of 18 will be required to complete a criminal background check.

Anyone who has had a child abuse or neglect conviction or is the subject of any pending criminal charges within or outside the Commonwealth of Virginia, or founded disposition of child abuse or neglect, as well as anyone refusing to sign the statement, will not be permitted to work with children.

Before beginning their first year of service, all paid and volunteer leaders, child care workers, children and youth Sunday School teachers, chaperones and youth workers will be required to read the church's Child Protection Policy and

Procedures and sign a form indicating that they have read and that they understand the policy and agree to abide by it. Anyone failing to do so will not be permitted to serve until the policy has been read and the form signed.

B. Two Adult Policy

Whenever possible, staff and volunteers will be assigned in teams of two or more. This may be 2 adults and/or an adult and a youth over the age of 12. This rule will apply to all classes and activities involving children and youth under 18. If the situation is deemed low risk (group of children as opposed to one-on-one, daylight as opposed to night, on-grounds as opposed to off-grounds – see Appendix A) then it is permissible to have 1 adult, however in these instances, where 1 adult is present, it is critical that other adults are on the premises and the Open Visibility Rule is fully implemented. This is intended to be the exception rather than the rule.

C. Open Visibility and Open Classroom Policy

Open visibility should be maintained for all activities involving children and youth. This means that activities should take place in full view of routine pedestrian traffic through the building through either glass window panels or through open doors. All rooms in the church may be visited without prior notice by church staff, parents, or other volunteer church workers.

D. Children Drop Off/Pick Up Policy

Parents/guardians or designees are expected to bring children ages birth through 5th grade to the appropriate classrooms. Parents/guardians or someone designated by written parental/guardian permission must pick-up children ages birth to 5th grade from activities.

VIII. Plan for Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

Should there be an allegation of child abuse at Great Bridge United Methodist Church, the matter should be reported immediately to the City of Chesapeake Department of Social Services, to the Senior Pastor, and the Chair of Staff Parish. Together, these individuals shall ensure that the appropriate actions will be taken. If the allegation involves the Senior Pastor, the matter should be reported to Social Services, the Associate Pastor, and the District Superintendent.

1. Every allegation of child abuse will be treated seriously.
2. Pray for the church and all persons affected by the allegation.
3. Immediately begin documenting all procedures observed in the handling of the allegation.
4. Immediately notify the Virginia Department of Social Services of the allegation.
5. Immediately notify the parents if it is not known that they have previous knowledge. (In the case the suspected abuser is the parent, they would not be notified.)
6. Immediately notify the church's insurance company.

7. If the accused have assigned duties within the life of the church that person must be temporarily relieved of his/her duties until the investigation is concluded.
8. It is appropriate to show care and comfort for the alleged victim. This should be the pastoral objective from the moment the allegation is received or otherwise made known.
9. Observe confidentiality for both the alleged victim and the accused.

IX. Social Media Policy

GBUMC views social networking sites, personal websites, and blogs positively, and respects the right of volunteer and paid employees to use them as a medium of self-expression. If a person chooses to identify himself or herself as a leader in GBUMC on such internet venues, some followers may view the individual as a representative of our church. In light of this possibility, our church requires, as a condition of volunteer or paid leadership, that individuals follow the guidelines described below when referring to the church, its programs or activities, its participants, and/or employees and volunteers, in a blog, social networking site, or on a website:

- Leaders must be respectful in all communications and blogs related to or referencing GBUMC, its employees, other volunteers, and participants in programs.
- Leaders must not use blogs or personal website to harass, bully, or intimidate others. Behaviors that constitute harassment and bullying include, but are not limited to, comments that are derogatory with respect to race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, color, national origin or disability; sexually suggestive, humiliating, or demeaning comment and threats to stalk, haze, or physically injure another person.
- Leaders must not post pictures of minors, other volunteers or paid staff persons, or any other person without receiving consent. For minors, consent must be given by a parent/guardian in written form.

Any person found to be in violation of this policy will be subject to disciplinary action per the GBUMC Employee Handbook Policy #7.

X. Sex Offenders as Members of God's Kingdom

In regards to 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 GBUMC 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:

- **Intentional Discussion:** Discussions could be held within the Administrative Council and the Administrative Council Team Support (ACTS) Team. Such discussions might include:
 - Ways to effectively incorporate convicted sex offenders into the life of the church without endangering children and youth
 - Requirement of participation in a professional counseling program for the individual for the entire time of membership
 - Areas of the church that are “off-limits” to the individual
 - Restrictions on leadership in or on behalf of the church
- **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, and chairperson of the church council. While 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.

XI. DISCIPLINE GUIDELINES FOR THOSE WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

When dealing with children and youth it is sometimes necessary to exercise disciplinary action in order to facilitate learning, maintain order and carry out planned activities in a safe manner.

Planning ahead for success:

- Disruptive behavior is diminished if enough learning opportunities are planned to keep children and youth engaged. It is better to over-plan than under-plan. Incorporate as age appropriate good story-telling techniques, drama, puppets, arts and crafts, cooking, scientific exploration, games, etc. Incorporating a varied learning environment helps all types of learners remain engaged.
- For overnight activities, boys and girls should have separate sleeping areas.
- It is critical that the children, youth and parents know what the behavioral expectations are ahead of time and what the consequence will be for failure to meet the behavioral expectations.

When discipline becomes necessary:

- Volunteers and paid staff are authorized to handle minor discipline problems without need of involving parents or staff.
- Verbal re-direction may and should be exercised. Care must be taken not to embarrass the child/youth. Yelling, shaming and physical contact are all absolutely forbidden.

- If verbal redirection is not successful and/or the nature of the problem indicates further counseling is necessary, the child /youth should be counseled with 2 adults present and/or with the parent present with consequences for continued misbehavior outlined.
- If the behavioral expectations are not met at this point, the promised consequences should take place quickly and without fanfare.
- It may be necessary to set up a parent-volunteer-paid staff conference if behavioral problems are chronic. By working together it may be possible to come up with a plan to modify the misbehavior.
- Restriction of participation privileges may be enacted as the last resort.
- If laws have broken it is the responsibility of the volunteer or paid staff to contact the appropriate legal authorities.
- Legal action may be necessary and should take place where appropriate.
- Alert the appropriate staff person any serious, reoccurring or chronic behavioral situations.
- Alert Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) of any serious, reoccurring or chronic behavioral situation involving paid staff.
- Notify appropriate staff person of any serious, reoccurring or chronic behavioral situation involving groups that use the building but are not fully integrated into the church.

Appendix A

Tools for Assessing the Risk/Reducing the Risk

There are 3 areas to consider when assessing the potential risk of a given situation. Volunteers and paid staff will consider these 3 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 Statement of Understanding and Intent Regarding GBUMC Child Protection Policy?
 - Have adult leaders for this activity completed Child Protection training?
 - Is the 2-Adult Rule and/or Open Visibility Rule being maintained during this activity?
 - If the activity is off grounds, has parental consent been sought 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, 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 2 adults, however in low risk setting it is permissible for one adult to be present as long as all other criteria are strictly maintained.

High-risk situations include:

- activities where one or few 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
- 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 either off church grounds
- where visibility is limited due to isolation are deemed high potential risk situations.

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

INCIDENT/ACCIDENT REPORT

Please Return this form to a member of our Pastoral Staff.

Injured Child's/Youth's Name _____

Child/Youth Parent/Guardian _____

When was Parent/Guardian Contacted? _____

Date and Time of Incident/Accident _____

Teacher/Leader/Volunteer Reporting Incident/Accident _____

Description of Incident/Accident

Action Taken

Other Comments:

REPORT OF SUSPECTED INCIDENT OF CHILD ABUSE

Please return this form to a member of our Pastoral Staff.

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

Name of Child/Youth (victim): _____

Victim's age and date of birth: _____

Date/place of initial conversation with/report from victim: _____

Victim's statement (provide a detailed summary of conversation): _____

Name of person accused of abuse: _____

Relationship of accused to victim (paid staff, volunteer, family member, other): _____

Reported to Director of Adult and Children's Ministries: Date/time: _____

Summary:

Call to victim's parent/guardian: Date/time: _____

Spoke with: _____

Summary:

Call to local children and family service agency: Date/time: _____

Spoke with: _____

Summary:

Call to local law enforcement agency: Date/time: _____

Spoke with: _____

Summary:

Other contacts: Date/time: _____

Spoke with: _____

Summary:

Spoke with: _____

Summary:

Spoke with: _____

Summary:

Signature of person reporting: _____

Print name: _____ **Date:** _____

Copies of this report sent/given to:

Resources Utilized & Additional Information

Resources Utilized

- *Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the risk of abuse in the church for children and youth.* Joy Thornburg Melton. Discipleship Resources: 2011.
- Virginia Department of Social Services Website (www.dss.virginia.gov)
- The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church (2012)

Additional Information

- Visit the Virginia Department of Social Services website at www.dss.virginia.gov.
- FaithTrust Institute (www.faithtrustinstitute.org)
- GBUMC Pastoral Staff (757-482-1049)

PERMISSION TO OBTAIN BACKGROUND CHECK - ADULT

I, the undersigned applicant, authorize Great Bridge United Methodist Church (GBUMC) through its independent contractor, Protect My Ministry, to procure background information on 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 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 written request to GBUMC, if such is made within a reasonable time from the date it was produced. I also understand that I may receive a written summary of my rights under the Fair Credit Reporting Act.

I have never been convicted or expunged of any crime against a minor.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

(This application authorizes limited members on staff at GBUMC in Chesapeake, VA to obtain background information on the applicant. GBUMC is required to keep completed applications on file for five years from the application date. All background reports are secured. Limited staff have access to background reports. All information is held in confidence.)

INFORMATION FOR BACKGROUND SCREENING

Printed Name:

First Middle Last

Other Names Used (*alias, maiden, nickname*):

Current Address:

Former

Address: _____

Daytime Phone Number: _____ Cell Phone Number: _____

Social Security Number: _____ - _____ - _____ Driver's License Expires: _____

Driver's License Number: _____ State of Issue: _____

DOB: ____/____/____ Gender: _____

Email: _____

(This application must be completed and signed by the applicant.)

CHILD PROTECTION ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Great Bridge United Methodist Church
201 Stadium Drive
Chesapeake, VA 23322
757-482-1049

Please complete the following form to indicate that you have read, understand and accept the Child Protection Policy and Procedures of Great Bridge United Methodist Church (GBUMC).

Name (Last, First, Middle) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Date of Birth _____

Names and location of church/es you have attended regularly during the past five years.

I have read and understand the Child Protection Policy and Procedures of GBUMC. I agree to abide by those policies and procedures. I have never been convicted of a crime involving child abuse, neglect or endangerment, and no founded complaint of child abuse or neglect has ever been made against me. No such conviction or founded complaint against me has ever been expunged. I authorize and release any references, which I might provide to GBUMC to provide the Church any information (including opinions) that they may have regarding my work with children and/or youth. I agree to immediately notify GBUMC in the event a complaint of child abuse, neglect or endangerment is made against me.

Signature

Date