

Safe Sanctuary Guidelines
Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults
Ephrata HOPE United Methodist Church
Ephrata, PA
February 2024

PREAMBLE

God calls us to create communities of faith where all people are protected, safe and allowed to grow strong. The congregation of Ephrata Hope UMC is committed to provide an emotionally and physically safe, spiritually grounded, healthy environment for all including those who minister as staff and volunteers. We hold these truths applicable to all and strive to keep in compliance with all aspects of the Pennsylvania law pertaining to Child Protective Services and the Adult Protective Services as amended from time to time. In the event the law conflicts with this policy, the law shall control.

KEY DEFINITIONS

Child or Youth is any person who has not reached their eighteenth birthday.

Person responsible for the child's welfare – a person who provides permanent or temporary care, supervision, training or control of a child in lieu of parental care, supervision and control; the term includes any person who has direct or regular contact with a child through any program.

Vulnerable Adult is a person, eighteen (18) years of age or older who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities as defined in the Adult Protective Services Act of 2010:

<https://www.legis.state.pa.us/CFDOCS/LEGIS/LI/consCheck.cfm?txtType=HTM&ttl=23&div=00.&chpt=063.&CFID=246217912&CFTOKEN=44782272>

Abuse is defined as the willful infliction of physical pain or injury or mental anguish, unreasonable confinement, or the willful deprivation of services which are necessary to maintain a person's mental and physical health.

Exploitation is the act or process of illegally or improperly using a person or their resources for another person's profit or advantage.

Neglect is an act or failure to act which results in the inadequate provision of care or services necessary to maintain the physical and mental health of the vulnerable adult, and which can result in serious injury, or is life-threatening.

SCREENING AND SELECTION OF STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

Careful screening is an effective tool and an essential step in selecting the most reliable, committed and experienced staff and volunteers. We support the following screening standards.

All applicants for paid employment or volunteer service in which the applicant will have direct contact with children, youth or vulnerable adults in a manner under Pennsylvania law currently in force or as amended in the future, must complete the following prior to start of service:

Written Application – a written application including:

- a) Name
 - b) Address
 - c) Phone Number
 - d) Work/Volunteer History
 - e) Experience and skills related to the position
 - f) Two (2) personal references from persons not related to the applicant
- 2) Background Checks
PA criminal record background, Child Line check and FBI clearance as required by the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania currently in force and as enacted and amended from time to time. The latest can be found at:
<https://www.dhs.pa.gov/KeepKidsSafe/Clearances/Pages/default.aspx>.
These are required for all employees and volunteers. Clearances must be resubmitted every 60 months (5 years) from the date of the first clearance which is the current law at the time of this writing. In the case of FBI clearances for volunteers only, an affidavit can be submitted if the person has been a resident of PA for 10 consecutive years. This can be found under Disclosure Statements at the abovementioned website.
- 3) Relationship with Church: all prospective volunteer workers shall have an active relationship with the local church for at least six months before being allowed in a supervisory role in activities; or twenty-four months of good standing at their previous church as documented by the Pastor with a letter from the previous church.

Records: all written records shall be confidential and shall be kept in a secure location with access restricted on a need-to-know basis, to the Pastor, SPRC chair or those appointed to track the information. All files (clearances, reference checks, training attendance, letters of recommendations from prior church, etc.) shall be maintained for **thirty (30) years** after ministry ends with the individuals. Files can be digitized and kept in a permanent online secure environment.

TRAINING

All persons who have direct contact with children, youth or vulnerable adults shall participate in training as required under the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania currently in force and as enacted and amended in the future from time to time. The initial training shall occur prior to the adult having direct supervision of children.

SUPERVISION

Supervision procedures are designed to reduce the possibility of abuse or exploitation of the target groups and to protect staff and volunteers from unfounded accusations.

Supervision Standards:

All programs and ministries of Hope UMC use the following standards for supervision:

- 1) Two Adult Rule – regardless of the group size, there will always be a minimum two non-related adults present. This may include the presence of an adult ‘roamer’ who moves in and out of rooms or activities.
- 2) No child or youth will be left unsupervised while participating in a ministry event.

- 3) All ministry activities will occur in open view.
- 4) For children and youth, no person shall supervise an age group unless he/she is at least 18 years of age or older and is at least 5 years older than the oldest children being supervised.
- 5) For children and youth, registration forms shall be completed and maintained by the ministry lead that lists allergies, medical issues/medications, permission to use photos, etc. Ministry events involving transportation require a written consent form signed by the parent or guardian of the child.
- 6) Persons leading any group containing Vulnerable Adults must be 18 years of age or older.
- 7) For vulnerable adults, attendance, including staff and volunteers, will be taken at every church function where a vulnerable adult is present. No staff person or volunteer may engage in any form of neglect, abuse or exploitation of a vulnerable adult.

Online Standards for Children and Youth:

The policies and procedures outlined here are relevant for any in person gathering or virtual (on-line) ministry activities. We will be diligent and follow all of the screening policies as they are easily overlooked.

We make use of best practices in the virtual world including:

- 1) The two-adult rule applies. At no time will one adult be holding a one-on-one conversation with any child or youth without other adults involved. Online meetings will begin with two non-related adults, and then allow youth to join.
- 2) The same selection, screening, and training policies apply as applicable to in person events. Any online discussion is considered no different than a face-to-face meeting.
- 3) To the extent possible, we will use a Hope general ministry-based on-line platform accounts rather than personal accounts.
- 4) We will maintain the same communication with parents and youth about meetings including times and links to access the meeting.
- 5) Release forms need to give permission for picture/video sharing or do not share pictures/videos of virtual meetings. This includes tagging your youth in the virtual environment.

REPORTING

Reporting any allegation of abuse will be done in accordance with the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania currently in force and as enacted and amended from time to time.

It is essential all staff and volunteers who have contact with children and youth under Pennsylvania law currently in force and as enacted and amended in the future define as a mandated reporter, have a legal responsibility to make a report directly to public child welfare officials any time they have reasonable cause to suspect abuse has occurred. Failure to comply with this requirement can lead to civil and/or criminal penalties for the staff or volunteer.

Reports of suspected child or youth abuse are made by either:

- Calling the Pennsylvania Child Abuse Hotline (24-Hour service) at **1-800-932-0313**.
- Or **online through the PA Department of Human Services established electronic filing system (www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis)**

Any staff or volunteer who suspects that a vulnerable adult is being abused, neglected, exploited or abandoned will call the Statewide Elder Abuse Hotline: **1-800-490-8505**.

The Pastor and District Superintendent shall be notified if the alleged perpetrator is a staff person or volunteer of the church. If the alleged perpetrator is the Pastor, the Chair of SPRC should be notified immediately and will notify the District Superintendent.

Pastoral responses to reports or allegations of abuse:

Any allegation of abuse requires a process to address responding to the victim, the alleged perpetrator, and the press. The response must be quick, compassionate and unified. All allegations are taken seriously.

Response to victims of abuse:

In the instance of any allegation of abuse, we will reach out to the victim and the victim's family. Pastoral resources shall be extended, and the conference I-Care Team is a good resource to assist in providing this service. The care and safety of the victim is the first priority. Response to the victim and the victim's family will be done in a positive and supportive manner.

If the allegation involves a child(ren) or youth(s), the parents of the victim will be notified and steps taken to address the safety and well-being of the child until the parent(s) arrive. If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, the direction of the child welfare authorities will be followed concerning notification of others.

Response to all alleged perpetrators of abuse:

Response to the alleged perpetrator and the perpetrator's family will be in a loving and supportive manor. The conference I-Care Team is a good resource to assist in providing this service.

In cases involving a child(ren) or youth(s), the alleged perpetrator will immediately be removed from further involvement and advised that there has been an allegation of abuse, done with dignity and respect. Details of the allegations of the abuse are not be discussed with the alleged perpetrator; care will be taken to handle the removal in a discreet manner.

When it has been alleged that a member of the church staff or volunteer has committed an act of abuse, the staff member or volunteer is required to refrain from all ministry activities/events until the incident has been fully resolved by the appropriate state authorities. At that time, a meeting will be held with the employee or volunteer to discuss the incident(s) that led to the report being made. Even if the public agency determines the report to be unfounded, the

church has the right to prohibit the volunteer or employee working in ministries based on the facts and circumstances available at that time.

Response to the Media:

After consultation with the presiding bishop, the District Superintendent, the Conference Director of Communications, and local pastor, a single spokesperson will be appointed for contact with the public/media. All media requests for statements shall be directed to that spokesperson.

Building Use Agreements

A building use agreement needs to be completed for any group that is a not a direct ministry group of Hope church and works with anyone under 18 years old. Excluded are single use activities for birthday parties, family gatherings, etc. The use agreement needs to identify the following options and which the group is following:

- The group agrees to follow the Hope Safe Sanctuary policy and complete all applications, training and background checks before the building can be used and they must comply with this policy as the building is being used.

or

- They need to provide a policy for the group that meets the minimum of the Hope policy and is approved by the church's trustees and Pastor.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church: Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in the Church <https://www.umc.org/en/content/book-of-resolutions-reducing-the-risk-of-child-sexual-abuse-in-the-church>

Pennsylvania Department of Human Services – Keep Kids Safe

<https://www.dhs.pa.gov/keepkidssafe/Pages/default.aspx>

Pennsylvania Department of Aging – Protective Services

<https://www.aging.pa.gov/organization/advocacy-and-protection/Pages/Protective-Services.aspx>

Pennsylvania Adult Protective Services Act

<https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/li/uconsCheck.cfm?yr=2010&sessInd=0&act=70>