Protection Policy Training Guide

For Local Churches

Michigan Conference of The United Methodist Church

Produced by the Michigan Conference Protection Policy Team

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**Protection Policy Training Guide for Local Churches**

**Purpose:**

This training guide has been created for local churches to use when training leaders in the areas of ministry with children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults. It can also be used as part of the training with hospitality leaders (such as ushers and safety teams) and church staff. Please adapt this training guide to your ministry setting and context. This is not a replacement for your local church protection policy (it may be called something else in your church). Review your own protection policy to ensure that the key points have been covered. You may also need to add content that is specific to your church. For example, if you have a building that doesn’t allow for wi-fi or cellular service throughout, teaching about how to communicate in an emergency should be included in your training. Or, changing the section on bathrooms so that it is in line with your facility may be necessary.

We have included a basic outline that you can use for guidance and a script that you can modify for your context.

Special thanks to the work of the Michigan Conference Protection Policy Team teaching plan, Rev. Mary Hagley and Rev. Christy White for their input in this Training Guide.

If you have questions about adjusting this training guide, please feel free to reach out to Kathy Pittenger, Michigan Conference Children’s Initiatives Coordinator at [kpittenger@michiganumc.org](mailto:kpittenger@michiganumc.org) or 517-347-4030 ext. 4077.

**Protection Policy Training Guide for Local Churches**

1. **Introductions & Opening** 
   1. Take a moment to invite people to introduce themselves and the ministry(ies) in which they serve. Even if you think everyone knows one another, it is a helpful way to open and give every person an opportunity to speak.
   2. Opening
      1. We are called to create faith communities where children, youth, vulnerable adults, and those who minister with them are safe and can grow strong in their faith and positive relationships with others.
      2. Jesus taught that “whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me,” (Mark 9:37, NRSV) and the Social Principles of The United Methodist Church state that “…children must be protected from economic, physical, and sexual exploitation and abuse.” Furthermore, at a child’s baptism, we affirm our responsibility to care for the well-being of that child by pledging: “With God’s help, we will so order our lives after the example of Christ, that this child, surrounded by steadfast love, may be established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal.” (From The Book of Worship, *Baptismal Covenant, Congregational Pledge II).*
      3. Working from these foundations it is important to establish and implement a protection policy and train those who work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.
      4. Let us pray, Gracious God, we give you thanks for the ministries that impact children, youth and vulnerable adults. Thank you for the opportunity to come together today to learn or be refreshed about protecting the children, youth, and vulnerable adults in our congregation and community. Help us listen with our hearts and minds so that we may be able to teach, lead, support, and care for all your people in ways that honor you and one another. We pray in Jesus Name, Amen.
2. **Purpose & Goals**
   1. “Why” people are there for the training and goals
      1. Our churches are places of community and faith. We need to be aware of and concerned about liability, the safety of our children, youth, vulnerable adults, volunteers, staff, and clergy, and the reputation of the church and God.
      2. Talk through and share best practices for working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults
      3. Learn about reporting procedures so that you feel empowered that if you suspect abuse or neglect you know what to do. We aren’t necessarily looking for abuse or neglect, we are prepared to handle it if necessary.
   2. Why is it required?
      1. Good practice, everyone is on the same page
   3. What are the benefits?
      1. Knowledge is power
      2. Protecting the vulnerable (children, youth, vulnerable adults) and the volunteers, staff, and clergy who work with them
      3. Learn best practices
3. **Training**
   1. Overview of Protection Policy
      1. Take a few moments to talk about your local church protection policy. You may want to give copies to those who are in your class, at least the policy portion (appendices may not be needed). And/or share where the full policy can be accessed.
   2. Important definitions (These definitions are based from the Protection Policy Template for Local Churches from the Michigan Conference of the UMC; you may need to adjust these definitions based on what is in your policy or church definitions.)
      1. Child/youth – an individual who is under the age of 18
      2. Vulnerable adult – an individual who because of age, developmental disability, mental illness, or physical handicap requires supervision or personal care or lacks the personal and social skills required to live independently
      3. Abuse – harm or threatened harm to an individual’s health, financial or welfare through physical abuse, bullying, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, maltreatment, and/or sexual harassment. For the purposes of this policy, ‘hazing’ is considered a form of abuse.
      4. Neglect - failure to act as a reasonably prudent person would do in the same or similar circumstance. In can include failing to prevent an act of abuse, negligent treatment, including the failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, health care and protection from abuse, placing a child, youth, or vulnerable adult in unreasonable risk.
      5. Elder Abuse – refers to any knowing, intentional, or negligent act by a caregiver or any other person that causes harm or serious risk of harm to a vulnerable adult. May include physical, sexual, emotional, financial/material, neglect, or abandonment.
      6. Include additional definitions as desired
4. **Guidelines**
   1. Proper Supervision
      1. Identify who is eligible to be an approved volunteer (this should be outlined in your policy. The statements below are suggested guidelines and can be found in the Protection Policy Template for Local Churches)
         1. Youth who are at least 16 years of age (must re-apply upon reaching age 18 as an adult)
         2. Must be at least 5 years older than the oldest child or youth in the ministry setting.
         3. Be active at the church for at least 6 months
         4. Complete all required paperwork (such as: application, references, background check release form)
         5. Anyone who has previously been convicted of, pled guilty or no contest to any crime of abuse or neglect or any act of conduct of a sexual, molesting, seductive, or criminally deviant nature is not eligible to work with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
      2. Rule of 2 or 3 (use the supervision rule that applies to your setting)
         1. Rule of 2 is that there are always two adults or qualified volunteers in each space. They must be unrelated and 5 years older than the students.
         2. Rule of 3 is that there are always at least 3 people in a space. This could be 2 qualified adults and 1 child/youth or 1 qualified adult and 2 children/youth.
         3. The ideal is to always have at least 2 qualified adults, but that may not always be the realistic (especially in smaller churches). When only 1 qualified adult is in a space it is important to make sure that there is a floater or an adult who is able to walk through the hallways and check in on the space. Also, make sure there is either a window in the door or leave the door open.
   2. Check-in/out Policy
      1. (Your church should have a check in/check out policy for children and youth – adapt this section to fit your context)
      2. Best practices include:
         1. Each child/youth/vulnerable adult should have paperwork on file that includes names and phone numbers for parents/guardians and emergency contacts. The names of who is allowed and who is not allowed to pick up children. Photo and media release. Allergy and medical concerns.
   3. Transportation
      1. The same supervision rules apply when transporting children/youth in a vehicle.
      2. Drivers should be at least 21 years old. Drivers should have a driving background check before being permitted to drive children/youth from one place to another. Drivers should also be able to provide proof of insurance. (Make sure this information is the same as your policy or your churches insurance requirements.)
      3. Children/youth should have a permission form on file giving permission from a parent/guardian for their child to ride with someone else.
   4. Overnights
      1. Youth & adults in separate rooms
      2. Separated by gender
      3. Assign roommates based on similar age and maturity
      4. At least two youth in each room
      5. Adults between youth rooms (if possible)
      6. Have a private conversation with youth/families who identify as LBGTQIA+ about the best way to care for their accommodations
      7. Establish a schedule, curfew, and conduct bed checks with adults visiting the rooms in pairs
   5. Good Touch/Bad Touch
      1. Touch should always be initiated by the child, youth, or vulnerable adult
      2. Good (or welcome) touch is meant to affirm, support, care for or help make someone feel good about themselves (hug, handshake, fist bump, high five, etc.)
      3. Bad (or unwelcome) touch may make one feel uncomfortable, violated, disregarded, or harmed.
      4. Confusing touch may send mixed signals
      5. Criteria for touching
         1. Location (head, shoulders, stop! Bathing suit areas are the no go zone)
         2. Duration
         3. Relationship
         4. Who initiates
         5. Cultural heritage
         6. Age of Child (holding an infant or toddler on a lap to comfort or read is acceptable, allowing an elementary school child or youth to sit on an adult’s lap is not acceptable)
   6. Risks and Rewards
      1. Consider the risks and rewards of activities. Consider the following factors:
         1. Safety
         2. Trust in the participants
         3. How controlled the environment is
         4. Who will ultimately be held responsible if someone is hurt?
      2. Discuss in your large group or small group the following situations and the risks and rewards of each:
         1. Youth Group trip to Cedar Point
         2. Icebreaker games
         3. Church lock-ins
         4. Large group games like Dodge Ball, Red Rover, Tackle football, Sardines/Ghosts in the Graveyard, etc.
5. **Scenarios**
   * 1. You are the Sunday School Superintendent at a small church and you can only find one adult volunteer for Sunday School. No one else is stepping up to help. You know that the policy and best practice is to have at least 2 non-cohabitating adults in the room. Are there any options for your small church?
        1. Possible responses: Yes. Parents take turns. If only 1 adult is possible make sure classroom is windowed, have an usher or other adult walk through hallway to check on the class, have a back up adult at pick up time to ensure that the leaders isn’t left with just one child
     2. You are taking a group of youth to a conference for youth. There are 2 adult chaperones (1 male and 1 female) and 5 youth (4 female and 1 male). How would you assign hotel rooms?
        1. Ideally, you would have 4 or 5 rooms. The female youth could share 1 room (all 4 together) or 2 rooms (2 in each room). The male youth would have his own room. The 2 counselors would each have their own room. Ideally, the adults room would be next to the rooms with the youth.
6. **Best Practices**
   1. Restrooms
      1. Infant/Toddler in diapers
         1. Diapering should be done in the nursery by a parent/guardian, staff member, or regular volunteer out in the open where others are present.
      2. Toddler Potty Training
         1. Allow child to do as much on own as possible. Assist if needed making sure there is another adult present who knows that volunteer is assisting young child.
         2. If an accident happens, try to get the parent/guardian. If not available, regular volunteer or staff can change if there is paperwork on file giving permission for another person to change the child.
      3. Children who are potty-trained
         1. Same gender volunteer takes student(s) to bathroom
         2. Check bathroom before child(ren) enters to be sure it is empty
         3. Wait outside bathroom for child(ren)
         4. Escorts child(ren) back to classroom
         5. Child/youth/adult with special needs
         6. Parent/guardian change or an adult staff member with another adult helper. There should be paperwork on file that specifically addresses this situation.
   2. Ministry with Children
      1. Behavior
      2. Behavior is communication. Children who are hungry, angry, tired, or lonely may “act out.” Try to figure out what is going on and meet those needs if possible.
      3. Positive Discipline
         * 1. Try not to say “No!”
           2. Catch kids in good behavior
           3. Focus on building character
           4. Redirect, redirect, redirect!
      4. Take wiggle breaks
      5. Adjust when needed
      6. Expectations
      7. Setting healthy boundaries (rules) with kids is helpful in the ministry setting. Encourage older kids to help create the expectations. Keep them simple. Learn about the expectations for the local elementary school and use them in your ministry setting. For example: Be responsible, respectful, kind and safe.
   3. Ministry with Youth
      1. One on one conversations with youth may need to happen. Find a quiet and public space. This is especially true in mentoring situations
      2. You may need to walk the line with youth between confidentiality and keeping minors safe
      3. Be aware of healthy boundaries in regards to communicating with youth via texting, email or social media (always include another adult in the conversations, should be limited between staff/volunteers and youth).
      4. Be aware of the current trends and influences on youth in today’s culture such as, cyber-bullying, sexting, social media, bullying, and hazing.
   4. Ministry with Children and Adults with Special Needs
      1. Have open communication with parents and individuals about how to care well and nurture their faith
      2. Consistency and routine are important
      3. Reach out to professionals in your area (for example, a school social worker) to lead a training about working with children with special needs if that may be helpful.
   5. Ministry with the Elderly
      1. Maintain the two-person rule (This is especially true if you are going to be doing a home visit with a single elderly adult. If a caregiver will be present, that meets the requirement.)
      2. Maintain boundaries and be aware of touch.
   6. Small Church/Rural Church Ministries
      1. Due to lack of willing volunteers or financial restraints, it may be challenging to comply with all the best practices/guidelines. It is important to have proactive conversations with your church’s governing board about how to “open up” ministry areas so that these spaces can be visible at all times. For example, it may mean creating modified half-doors in the nursery or children’s room(s) or installing a window in doors for visual access.
      2. It is also important to have conversations about who will be floating if you are using the rule of 3 (with one approved adult in the room with at least 2 children) and who will be in the room at the end of worship to ensure the volunteer is not left with one child.
7. **Additional information** relevant to your context (emergency drills, what to do and where to go in an emergency, check-in/out system, playground usage, other policies and procedures specific for your context or age group. If you are leading this group just for youth workers, you may want to add additional information about working with youth.)
8. **Reporting** (may wish to show the DHS video on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qFrtr6ybHH8&t=27s> or the online process at <https://youtu.be/hz0CLJ6e9Xw>)
   1. What to do if a child/youth/vulnerable adult tells you about possible abuse
      1. Listen!
      2. If possible and with the permission of the child/youth/vulnerable adult, invite another staff person or trusted adult in the conversation
      3. Comfort and sit near the child/youth/vulnerable adult, but to not touch without them initiating contact
      4. Stay calm
      5. Reassure the person (they did nothing wrong and you believe them)
      6. Encourage the young person to tell you what happened, but do not press for details or interrogate. Do try to get the who/what/where/when details
      7. If asked to keep a secret, respond with honesty, “I will not tell other staff or others, but I may have to tell someone who can help you.”
      8. After the conversation document your recollection of the conversation
      9. It is not your responsibility to gather evidence or further details. Report what you know and let the proper authorities take it from there.
      10. Follow the steps for reporting abuse.
   2. What to do if you suspect abuse
      1. If a child or youth discloses that they feel like they may have been abused, you need to report it. It is not your job to determine if the disclosure is true or accurate, it is your responsibility to report it.
   3. What to do if you witness abuse
      1. Consult with the ministry leader or clergy immediately
      2. Keep a written record of the concerns and your follow up actions (i.e. whom you spoke with and when; not your own investigation)
      3. Name specific behaviors and your reaction
      4. In an emergency, call 911
      5. Follow the steps for reporting abuse
   4. Mandated Reporters
      1. Clergy are mandated reporters. Volunteers may not be mandated reporters by law, but we have a moral and ethical responsibility to speak up when we witness or are concerned about abuse or neglect.
   5. How to report suspected abuse or neglect
      1. Child or Youth – contact DHS (oral & written report or on-line report; 855.444.3911 or <https://newmibridges.michigan.gov/>)
      2. Adult or Elder – contact Adult Protective Services (855-444-3911)
   6. It is our responsibility to contact the appropriate agencies in the event that we suspect abuse or neglect. It is not our responsibility to take any of the matters into our own hands or do further investigations.
   7. You may have additional information or guidelines in your protection policy that you may wish to lift up. Feel free to use that. The video is also a great resource.
9. **Dealing with the media**
   1. If suspected abuse happens during a ministry event, the local church should make sure the clergy is informed. The district superintendent should be contacted. More information about how to respond is on the conference website. A best practice is to ask for the reporter’s name and contact information and respectfully tell them that the designated spokesperson will be in touch as soon as possible. One response could be “I want to be sure you get the most accurate information. If you give me your contact information I will ask our spokesperson to return your call as soon as possible.”
10. **Scenarios**
    1. Participants are in an open setting at a community park. One child needs to use the Rest Room. All the authorized care providers are busy. So, you send an older child (of the same gender) with this child to go to the rest room. When they return, the younger child is crying and they tell you that there was a person in the rest room who made sexual advances toward them and who also exhibited indecent exposure.
       1. What do you do?
       2. Do you call the police?
       3. Do you contact the parents of the children?
       4. Do you contact DHS?
       5. If media comes, do you tell them what occurred? Who has the authority to speak to the media in an instance such as this?
    2. Approved volunteers are staffing the nursery for young children on a Sunday morning. There is a sign in and sign out procedure in place. At the end of worship there are many parents picking up children and the children are, of course, excited to see their parents. One young girl, screams, daddy, and the father signs the girl out of the nursery. A few minutes later, a woman comes (volunteers do not know this is the little girl’s mother) and asks for her daughter. The volunteers quickly look around the room and go to the sign out sheet. The mother sees that the father has signed the young child out of the nursery. The mother screams, you can’t do that, he does not have custody. How could you let this happen? I signed her in, I should have signed her out. The mother leaves very upset.
       1. What should be done now?
       2. How could this have been prevented?
       3. Do the care givers report this to the event director? What about to DHS?
       4. What are some procedures that you might have in place OR what procedures do you have in place?
11. **Paperwork (if needed)**
12. **Questions**
13. **Close with Prayer**