

Grace United Methodist Church

Child, Youth and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy

9750 Wellington Road, Manassas VA 20110 www.umcgrace.org Revised July 2020

When we baptize a person in the United Methodist Church, in response to God's grace poured out in that moment, we make promises as a congregation. We say:

With God's help, we will proclaim the good news and live according to the example of Christ. We will surround this person with a community of love and forgiveness, so that they may grow in their service to others. We will pray for them, that they may be true disciples who walk in the way that leads to life (United Methodist Hymnal, page 40).

In promising to surround the baptized person with a community of love and forgiveness and to help them grow in their faith, we are promising to be the people who teach them in Sunday school, who help lead mission trips, who speak to them at church and who care for them in times of trouble. We're also promising to be people who will make sure that church is a place of safety, health and help. All of God's children are people of sacred worth, and Grace UMC establishes these guidelines for how volunteers and staff interact with children, youth and vulnerable adults to help ensure that we live up to these promises to the very best of our ability.

Section I: Appropriate Conduct for those Serving Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults

A. One-on-One Mentoring or Consultation

Healthy mentoring relationships and appropriate conversations with Christian leaders are an important part of how we share the faith and support one another as a church family. Such conversations will be conducted in a clearly observable room or area. When privacy concerns require set-apart space, such conversations still need to take place in a room with a window to the hallway or with the door open, and the adult leader needs to make sure that another adult leader knows about the conversation.

B. Classroom and Event Discipline

Christian leaders are asked to serve because of their passion, desire to help and love for those with whom they do ministry—they are not always experts in maintaining classroom discipline. At Grace UMC, all those working with children, youth or vulnerable adults will use the following classroom/event discipline measures:

1. If someone in the group is behaving inappropriately, the leader will tell that person specifically what he/she is doing that is unacceptable and state what the expected behavior is. (e.g., “You may not throw blocks. Blocks are for building.” “People are not allowed to go outside by themselves during Youth Group. Come join us for the discussion.”)
2. If this is not effective, the person behaving inappropriately will be guided to another activity, or separated from those who may be exacerbating the inappropriate behavior, and the leader will follow up with the person’s parents/guardians after the event.
3. If the person still continues behaving inappropriately, they will be removed from the classroom or event, and handed over to the supervision of the appropriate staff member (The Director of the ministry area or the Pastors) and all parties will follow up with the person’s parents/guardians.
4. At no time will physical punishment or verbal abuse (including ridicule or sarcasm) be used. Leaders will model Christian behavior in demonstrating kindness, patience, self-control and in maintaining high expectations that those whom they lead will likewise strive to live by these behaviors in age-appropriate ways.

C. Physical Contact

1. As a part of the healthy relationships that often form between leaders and the children, youth or vulnerable adults with whom they are in ministry, Grace UMC encourages friendly and caring contact as it is appropriate to the relationship of a teacher/leader and ministry participant. Side-hugs and space-hugs, an arm around the shoulder in a difficult time or hands held in prayer are all excellent examples of appropriate physical contact within this “community of love and forgiveness” that we have promised to create within the church.
2. Full-contact physical contact is never appropriate, and absolutely no contact with anyone’s “swimsuit areas” should ever take place. For all ministries preschool age and up, no leader should hold a child on their lap at any time, and at all times, the leader should take the child/youth/vulnerable adult’s cues about their comfort level as well as the leader’s own comfort level with even generally appropriate types of contact.
3. Physical contact with babies and toddlers, including diapering practices, is covered under the Nursery Policies, and while some aspects of physical contact with these age groups are different, the principle remains that we are seeking to be faithful to our promises to provide a place of safety, health and help to all people.

D. Social Media

Leaders in ministry with people who have cell phones and social media may find themselves invited to be “friends”, “follow” or otherwise be connected through social media. In many ways, these connections can enhance relational ministry and allow leaders to be a part of a person’s life in a unique way. However, leaders need to be savvy enough to set up appropriate privacy barriers for themselves, to know what should and should not be shared with those in their ministry area, and to know how to interact appropriately as a trustworthy mentor in the faith. Directors of ministry areas will conduct training as needed and make guidelines available to leaders.

E. Qualifications for Leadership

Each volunteer who assists more than one time, will be asked to fill out a background check form by the Director of the ministry area. Each year there will be a refresher course training for volunteers by the Director of the ministry area where a ministry covenant will be signed and kept on file. This contract states there have been no changes in their status since their last background check and that the volunteers’ responsibility is to disclose any infringement. At this time, we do background checks every 3 years at the ministry area’s expense.

Section II: Supervision

A. Overnight Retreats, Mission Teams and Driving Trips

1. Overnight events will have at least two background checked chaperones participating from Grace UMC.
2. With mixed-gender groups of participants, both male and female chaperones will be present with the group or at the event. Single-gender groups may have chaperones of only their gender.
3. Adult couples are welcome to be chaperones, but a couple may not be the sole chaperones for an overnight event.
4. Sleeping arrangements and retreat/team rules will be set clearly to ensure privacy, supervision and appropriate gender/age segregation.
5. Adults serving in leadership for overnight events will refrain from smoking or consuming alcohol while supervising the event.
6. *Lead* volunteer chaperones for overnight events will be 25 years old or older and have completed a background check (See “E” below for more information about background checks). Other volunteer chaperones will be 18 years old or older and may serve at Grace UMC staff and pastors’ discretion. All driving chaperones, including those driving their personal vehicles, will allow the staff to make a photocopy of their driver’s license.

7. The Grace UMC staff member coordinating the overnight event will, in consultation with the Pastors, have final discretion about leaders and chaperones for overnight retreats, mission teams and events.

B. Classes and Groups

1. Classes and groups with children, youth or vulnerable adults, whether on-site at Grace UMC or out in the community, will make every effort to have two adults present at all times. Due to the high volume of activity at certain times (for instance, Sunday mornings), it may not be possible to have two adults present at every moment, but if it is necessary to have only one adult present, a Grace UMC staff member will be notified in order to provide extra support in that context.
2. We encourage adult leaders of classes and small groups to build ongoing faith relationships with those who are participating. Regular leaders of these groups are entrusted with a key role in the lives of children, youth and vulnerable adults, and we are grateful for their positive influence and Christian mentorship. All ongoing, regular group leaders will permit the church to conduct a background check once every three years that they serve in ministry, and they will consult yearly with the Grace UMC staff member in their ministry area about any relevant updates. (See “E” below for more information about background checks.)

C. Childcare

1. Two responsible persons will be present on the same floor of the church at all times for nursery care, and appropriate ratios and practices will be followed under the Nursery Policy.
2. Ongoing regular providers of childcare (who take care of children at Grace more than twice a month) will permit the church to conduct a background check every three years and will consult yearly with the Appropriate Director of the ministry about any relevant updates. (See “E” below for more information about background checks.)

D. Community Groups Serving Children, Youth or Vulnerable Adults

Community groups meeting in the church on a regular basis that include children, youth or vulnerable adults in their work must submit a copy of their child protection policy to the Grace UMC office to be kept on file.

E. Background Checks

1. All staff members; lead chaperones for overnight events involving children, youth or vulnerable adults; ongoing regular adult leaders of classes/groups for children, youth or vulnerable adults; and ongoing regular childcare providers must permit Grace UMC to conduct a criminal and/or sex offender background check on them once every three years that they are involved in ministries with these populations. The church bears the expense of these background checks.

2. Annually, background checked leaders must affirm that there have been no relevant developments in these areas, and/or they must consult with the staff member directing their area of ministry about any incidents. A covenant is signed each year and is kept on file.
3. The results of the background checks and the annual affirmations will be maintained in a secure location by the church employee who coordinates with the relevant government agencies to conduct the background checks. A copy of the annual affirmation will be signed by the appropriate Grace UMC staff member and returned to the leader.
4. Background checks conducted for camps, employment or other organizations may be accepted for the leader's file, at the discretion of the relevant Director of ministry or the Pastors.