



Safe Sanctuary Policy for the Prevention of Abuse of Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults

Buncombe Street Methodist Church, Greenville, SC

Revised: November 2024

**Safe Sanctuary Policy
For the
Prevention of Abuse of Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults**

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Safe Sanctuary Policy

for the Prevention of Abuse of Children, Youth, & Vulnerable Adults

at Buncombe Street Methodist Church

Since 2007, churches have sought to provide and implement Safe Sanctuaries practices. Each local church must maintain a Safe Sanctuaries policy and review it annually.

Jesus said, “Whoever welcomes (a) child...welcomes me.” (Matthew 18:5). Children are our present and our future, our hope, our teachers, our inspiration. They are full participants in the life of the church and the realm of God.

Jesus also said, “If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones...it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6). Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to the little ones, the children.

Buncombe Street Methodist Church adopts this policy for the prevention of child abuse in our church:

I. Purpose

The purpose for establishing this Safe Sanctuary Abuse Prevention Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our total and unwavering commitment to the physical, emotional, and spiritual safety of all our children, youth and vulnerable adults.

II. Covenant Statement

Buncombe Street Methodist Church hereby pledges to conduct the ministry of Jesus Christ in ways that assure the physical and emotional safety and spiritual growth of all of our children, youth and vulnerable adults – as well as all of our workers with children, youth and vulnerable adults. We will follow reasonable safety measures when selecting and recruiting workers; we will implement appropriate operational procedures in all areas of programming and care; we will train our workers with children and youth on our procedures and policies; and we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse consistent with South Carolina state law.

III. Theological Reflection

We adopt this policy in accordance with the statement we as a congregation make at each baptism – that we will “nurture children and youth in the Christian faith and life and include them in our care.” With this policy, we renew our baptismal pledge to “live according to the example of Christ” and surround children and youth with a “community of love and

forgiveness, that they may grow in their trust of God, and be thus confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal.” (Baptismal Covenant II, United Methodist Book of Worship).

IV. Volunteer and Staff Recruitment and Selection Guidelines

- A. **Age** – Volunteers and paid staff who work with children and youth in any position of authority must be at least 21 years of age and at least 5 years older than the age of the persons they are working to serve.
 - 1. **Youth Volunteers** –Whenever possible, the aforementioned 5 year age difference should be observed. Parent must complete a Youth Application on behalf of their child. They also must attend safe sanctuary training. Otherwise, they must follow all other guidelines in this policy.
 - 2. **Youth Interns** – An exception to the age requirements is made when hiring 18-21 year old college-interns to work with youth. Details for this position can be found in the Youth Intern Policy. Whenever possible, the youth interns must be at least 5 years older than the age of the persons they are working to serve or will have a supervisory adult: someone who is 21 years old or older and who has been approved for this leadership program.
- B. **Church affiliation** – All volunteers and whenever possible, paid staff who work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults must have been an active participant in the church for at least 6 months. Volunteers affiliated with one of BSMC’s mission partners but does not attend BSMC may be conditionally certified to serve in mission-specific activities. Similarly, for mission trips, if a person does not attend, he/she can be conditionally certified in this specific capacity. In all cases, the volunteer must complete the Safe Sanctuary requirements listed in this document and serve alongside two or more fully qualified Safe Sanctuary adults.
- C. **Workers with children, youth, & vulnerable adults** – A satisfactory background check must be completed before volunteers and paid staff work with children, youth or vulnerable adults in the church.
- D. **Application** – Applicants must complete and sign an application form (staff) or information form (volunteers) and the related waivers giving permission to check references and background information.
- E. **Reference Checks** – Church leaders will check three references for each primary worker. The references will be performed by phone, by mail, by email or in person.
- F. **Background Checks** – National Criminal background checks will be made of all clergy, paid staff and volunteers who have supervisory program responsibility for children, youth, vulnerable adults, & all other church employees. These will be re-checked every three years.

- G. **Prior Convictions** – Individuals who have been convicted of physical or sexual abuse or neglect may not work in any church-sponsored activity or program for preschoolers, children, youth or vulnerable adults. Individuals who have been convicted of financial crimes will not work with money. Individuals who have been convicted of DUI in the past 5 years will not drive persons of any age.
- H. **Interview** – All applicants will be contacted by ministry staff to determine areas of suitability to serve. Church policy and guidelines should be discussed during the interview.
- I. **Child Abuse Survivor Applicants** – Adult survivors of childhood physical or sexual abuse need the love and acceptance of this church family. A person's experience with abuse and their recovery process may be pertinent to their suitability as youth and children's ministry workers. Applicants who are survivors of abuse should discuss this in confidence with the person who conducts the confidential interview. If an applicant is uncomfortable doing so, he or she may have the interview conducted by a pastor.
- J. **Confidentiality of Information** – The church will keep confidential all information received in the applicant selection process. Selection information will be marked as such and stored in a locked location with limited access only by church staff and others with a need to know.
- K. **Required Forms and Signatures** – In addition to staff application and reference forms, all applicants will sign an "Authorization and Request for Criminal Background Check" form.

V. Supervision Guidelines

- A. **Two-adult rule** – Two non-related adults will be present whenever possible during classroom activities, activities away from church facilities, and when transporting children and youth. If this is not possible, at least one adult will be assigned as a "rover" to walk the halls and regularly look in on teachers and the groups they are leading. Whenever possible, teachers will be assigned in teams of two or more per Sunday School hour to every class of children and youth. When feasible, both male and female leaders should be present. If the group stays overnight at the church, or if a church-sponsored group leaves the premises, two or more leaders will be present and will include at least one male and one female, if the group is mixed gender.
 - 1. **Lodging** -- In situations where lodging is required, children and adults will be segregated and will not share common rooms unless two or more adults are stationed in each room. In the case of segregation between children and adults, there will be peripheral adult supervision.
 - 2. **Ratios** – Reasonable and practical ratios of adults: children, youth, and vulnerable adults. Whenever possible a 1:7 ratio should be applied.

3. **Bathroom Use** -- Whenever possible, supervising adults should not use the bathroom at the same time as children, youth, or vulnerable adults and should follow these guidelines:
 - i. When supervising restroom use, supervising adults should first quickly scan the bathroom before allowing children, youth, and vulnerable adults to enter.
 - ii. For “Group Bathroom Breaks,” whenever possible, require supervising adult to take groups of two or more children, youth, or vulnerable adults to the bathroom—following the “rule of three” or more. Whenever possible, staff or volunteers will stand outside the bathroom door but remain within earshot.
 - iii. For single use restrooms, require children, youth, or vulnerable adults to inform supervising adults of use of the bathroom whenever possible. Require supervising adult to frequently check bathrooms.
4. **Locker Room Use:** Whenever possible, the locker room procedures include:
 1. Requiring supervising adults to stand within earshot of the locker room when in use by children, youth or vulnerable adults.
 2. Requiring supervising adults to routinely check inside the locker room so users know the locker room is monitored.
 3. Discouraging the use of locker rooms by children, youth, and vulnerable adults of different ages at the same time.
 4. Prohibiting the use of locker room horseplay such as towel snapping.
5. **Shower Use:** Supervising adults must not shower with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. While the children, youth, and vulnerable adults shower, at least one adult supervisor should stand in the bathroom doorway and within earshot of the children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

B. **Nursery Procedure** – All parents using the church nursery will observe procedures and guidelines found in the *Welcome to Our Nursery* pamphlet.

1. **Procedures for Diapering**

- i. Require that diapers only be changed when at least two adults are present.
- ii. Inform parents/guardians if supervising adult notices anything out of the ordinary or concerning while changing the infant’s diaper.

2. Procedures for toilet-use while toilet-training

- i. Require supervising adult to stand in the doorway with the bathroom door (not the stall door) ajar while children use the restrooms.
- ii. If supervising adults must enter a single-use restroom or stall to assist a child, ensure that the doors remain open.
- iii. When possible, send in only one child at a time.
- iv. When not possible, send in only as many children as there are stalls.

C. **Sign-In Policy** – Children, ages infant through fifth grade, must be checked into our electronic security system when they are away from their parent except for basketball practice and games. If the computers are down, a paper sign-in system will be used.

1. Children and youth should not be roaming the church buildings or premises without adult supervision. Parents are responsible for children and youth when not a part of the church's scheduled event.
2. Parents should not drop off children and youth prior to 10 minutes of an event's schedule start time. All children and youth should be picked up by 10 minutes after event's scheduled end time.

D. **Open-Door Policy** – Further protection for children, youth and vulnerable adults requires that an open-door policy be followed whenever possible. The legal guardian of the children served, clergy, administrative and professional staff of the church have the right to visit unannounced and observe any children or youth activity, classroom or church-sponsored program at any time.

E. **Outside Access** – There must be access to a telephone or cell phone when a group is at or away from the church facility. The church office or an authorized church representative will be given this number prior to a group's departure from church property.

F. **Doors and Windows** – All classroom and office doors will have a window or visibility from the hallway or will remain open while occupied. Windows will be kept free from adornment, and exterior windows will always be locked. Doors without visibility from the outside will be replaced with doors with windows when replacement is needed.

G. **Individual Counseling** – One-on-one interactions with children, youth and vulnerable adults are sometimes necessary and appropriate, but care must be taken that they be conducted in an environment that provides visibility by other adults. If at all possible, another adult is to have knowledge of staff members' whereabouts and with whom they are meeting. All incidents of suspected abuse and neglect revealed during the session will be reported in accordance with Section IV of this policy.

- H. **Outings Away from Church Property** – Parents of all children and youth participating in out-of-town and overnight outings must sign a written consent form and a notarized medical release form, both of which may be completed for a one-year period, but must be renewed annually. In no circumstance is one adult (other than the parent) to take a child or children on an overnight outing alone. Female staff will supervise female youth in their sleeping quarters, and male staff will supervise male youth. Whenever possible married couples will observe the female/female and male/male sleeping arrangements. With the exception of a parent/child combination, adults and youth will not occupy the same bed or sleeping bag.
- I. **Visiting Vulnerable Adults in their homes or nursing homes.** Volunteers may visit vulnerable adults in their home, individually, as long as the vulnerable adult's caregiver is on-site and gives consent. Volunteers may visit a vulnerable adult, individually, in a nursing facility as long as it is in a public area within visibility of nursing home staff and residents.
- J. **Gifts** – Volunteers and paid staff who work with children and youth will not give gifts to individual children or youth. Because gift-giving can be a form of buying loyalty or silence, gift-giving should be done on a group basis and only on special occasions. Gifts should be modest and appropriate to the occasion.
- K. **Appropriate and Inappropriate Physical and Verbal Interactions** -- Physical affection should be appropriate to the age of the individual involved.
1. Touch should generally only be initiated by the child or youth. It should be a response to the child or youth's need for comfort, encouragement, or affection. It should not be based upon the adult's emotional need.
 - i. **Appropriate Physical & Verbal Interactions:** In view of the above criteria, Appropriate Physical Interactions may include side hugs, shoulder-to-shoulder hugs, pats on the shoulder or back, handshakes, high-fives, fist bumps, arm around shoulders, holding hands (with young children in escorting situations). Appropriate Verbal Interactions include positive reinforcement, appropriate jokes, encouragement, or praise.
 - ii. **Inappropriate Physical & Verbal Interactions:** Inappropriate Physical Interactions include but are not limited to full-frontal hugs, kisses, lap sitting, wrestling, piggyback rides, tickling; however, the exception to the aforementioned inappropriate Physical Touch would include an age-appropriate response to the child or youth's need for comfort, encouragement, or affection. Inappropriate Physical interactions in all

cases include but are not limited to showing affection in isolated areas, massage, any unwanted touch, touch to the bottom, chest, or genital areas. Inappropriate Verbal Interactions include name-calling, discussing sexual encounters, discussing personal problems or issues with children, youth, or vulnerable adults, secrets, cursing, off-color or inappropriate jokes, shaming, belittling, derogatory remarks, harsh language that would be expected to frighten, threaten or humiliate.

2. A person's preference for touch should be respected. Do not force affection upon anyone. Staff and Volunteers are responsible to protect individuals under their supervision from inappropriate touching by others.
3. Physical touch/affection should only be given when in the presence of others. It is much less likely that touch will be inappropriate or misconstrued as such when two adult staff or volunteers are present, and the touch is open to observation. Touch should not give even the appearance of wrongdoing. This is especially important when diapering a baby or helping a young child change clothes or use the restroom. In this event, the door should be cracked and another adult within line of sight or line of hearing.

L. **Bullying Policy** -- Buncombe Street Methodist Church is committed to providing a safe, caring, nurturing environment for all our children. We have zero tolerance for bullying and will handle any incidences that occur according to the policy detailed herein.

1. For the purposes of this policy, actions considered bullying will be identified by the following definition:
 - Bullying is aggressive behavior that involves unwanted, negative actions.
 - Bullying involves a pattern of behavior repeated over time.
 - Bullying involves an imbalance of power or strength.
 - A person is bullied when he/she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons, and he/she has difficulty defending himself/herself.
2. Bullying can take on many forms:
 - Verbal bullying including derogatory comments and bad names
 - Bullying through social exclusion or isolation
 - Physical bullying such as hitting, kicking, shoving, and spitting
 - Bullying through lies and false rumors

- Having money or other things taken or damaged by students who bully
 - Being threatened or being forced to do things by students who bully
 - Racial bullying
 - Sexual bullying
 - Cyber bullying (via cell phone or Internet)
3. When there is a suspected occurrence of bullying, it should be brought to the attention of the supervising adult present at the time of the incident by either the child, youth or vulnerable adult targeted and/or any witnesses, parents, or volunteers. Appropriate BSMC staff (Children's Ministry for children, Youth Ministry for youth, a Pastor for vulnerable adults) should be immediately made aware of any reports. The Staff member will keep a record of any reported claims of bullying in order to document patterns or trends in behavior.
4. **Actions to be taken for a child, youth or vulnerable adult who is found to be bullying another child or youth:** When an incident occurs, which is identified as falling under the definition of bullying, a staff member will talk with the child, youth or vulnerable adult involved and parents/guardians will also be contacted. If bullying remains a problem the following action steps may be applied:
- The parents/guardians will be asked to attend the program/class with his/her child, youth, or vulnerable adult
 - Child, youth, or vulnerable adult will be separated for the ministry activity (separate A/B groups)
 - A mentor will be assigned to assist the child, youth, or vulnerable adult.
5. **Actions to be taken for child or youth and family of child or youth who has been bullied:** The parents/guardians will be notified immediately of the incident and be made aware of the bullying policy at church. The parents/guardians will be notified of the actions taken place with the child, youth, or vulnerable adult who bullied. If the bullying issue is not resolved, an appropriate plan for the situation will be created and implemented.
6. **Actions that do not fit the definition of bullying as detailed above, will be handled according to the BSMC discipline policy.**

M. Social Media and Digital Interaction Policy -- This policy applies to social media and all digital communications with minors.

- BSMC's official social media participation is managed by the Communication's Committee. This committee is responsible for regularly posting information on the ministry's behalf and for monitoring and responding to posts on these pages.
- Ministry employees who misuse the ministry's social media resources in ways that violate the law or other ministry policies are subject to disciplinary action.
- As many young people now communicate through phones, social media, and other forms of technology, it is important that our staff and volunteer leaders maintain healthy boundaries with students that are "above reproach." Specifically, Staff Members and Volunteers should observe the following guidelines when it comes to communicating with students over technology:
 - a. Staff Members and Volunteer Leaders are strongly discouraged from any one-on-one DM "direct messaging" with students. Leaders should also be cautious to avoid ongoing, one-on-one, in-depth message chains with students. These online chats should be used to encourage students and to make connections but not for extended dialogue which may blur the lines between leader and friend for students. It is the responsibility of the adult to set clear boundaries regarding appropriate digital communication. If texting or direct messaging with a minor, the parent should be aware of the communication and/or should be included in the text group.
 - b. Staff Members and Volunteer Leaders should avoid talking about anything of an inappropriate sexual nature when talking with students over social media/texts/etc. Even over the phone, staff and leaders should proceed with caution. Whenever possible, staff and volunteers should move these sensitive conversations into a more observable format while continuing to comply with Safe Sanctuary guidelines (see Section V).
 - c. Staff Members and Volunteer Leaders should be cautious about what they post on their personal social media websites if any of their followers/friends are minors. Our personal lives should be a good model for students, so leaders should be cautious with posts.
 - d. It is recommended that staff and volunteer leaders not follow/friend students they do not already know and have an established relationship with. Even for students that staff/volunteer leaders do know; it is recommended that they allow students to initiate the friend/follow request.

- N. **Safe Sanctuary addendum for off-site contact** – Research shows many cases of organizational abuse occur off-site and outside of regularly scheduled activities. Allowing contact outside of regularly scheduled activities may put employees, volunteers, church participants, and our church at increased risk. The following policy helps manage the risk of abuse and false accusations arising from contact outside the church's regularly scheduled programming.

Examples of contact outside of regularly scheduled program activities:

- Babysitting arrangements
- Tutoring
- Private lessons/coaching
- Mentorship
- Social interactions between employee's or volunteer's children and children served by the organization:
 - Playdates and birthday parties
 - Sleepovers
 - Overnight trips and vacations
 - Rides to/from organization or extracurricular activities and events
- Attending public events in a shared community (like graduation or sports events)
- Continued contact with church participant after their participation in a program has ended

Examples of appropriate outside contact include:

- Participating in pre-arranged activities with members of ministry groups in which multiple members of the group are invited and expected to participate.
- Attending functions at the home or residence of a minor or vulnerable adult when a parent/guardian is present or readily accessible and has knowledge of and has consented to the contact.
- Providing childcare services to a minor at the written request of the minor's parent/guardian.
- Visiting a vulnerable adult in a long-term care facility, hospital, or other place of care open to the public.
- Visiting a vulnerable adult in a private setting such as a home, where multiple members of a group are present.

Examples of inappropriate outside contact by an employee or adult volunteer include:

- Transporting a minor in a personal vehicle to another location without the written permission of a parent/guardian.
- Visiting a minor in his or her home or residence without a parent/guardian present or readily accessible.
- Meeting alone with a minor in a private location without the written permission of a parent/guardian.
- Spending the night in the same location as a minor or vulnerable adult without the written permission of a parent/guardian.

- Engaging in personal communications with a minor via text or on social media that are inconsistent with the mission of the Church.
- Initiating contact with a minor after the minor has ceased active participation or membership in a ministry group or the Church for purposes of engaging in off-site contact in a private or unsupervised setting.

This organization strongly encourages employees and volunteers to refrain from outside contact with church participants who are children, youth, or vulnerable adults with which they do not have a pre-existing familial or social relationship (i.e., children are friends at school, families attend same social club) if the situation could put the physical or emotional safety or spiritual growth of a child, youth or vulnerable adult at risk or give rise to an appearance of impropriety. However, if interactions with church participants outside of regularly scheduled church program activities are part of programming or otherwise unavoidable, this organization offers the following guidelines:

1. If there is a pre-existing social or familial relationship, ensure proper boundaries are drawn by the employee or volunteer while in organization programming.
 - a. For example, if Emily Employee is best friends with Church Member Charlie's mom such that Church Member Charlie calls Emily by her first name in social settings, ensure Emily communicates to Church Member Charlie that while in organization programming Church Member Charlie needs to call Emily, Ms. Employee. This helps reinforce the boundary and makes clear that Emily's role as an employee or volunteer is different than her role as Church Member Charlie's mom's best friend and the relationship should reflect that.
 - b. If Emily has children that are friends with Church Member Charlie, she can give Church Member Charlie a ride if her children are also in the car. Even in that interaction, make sure Church Member Charlie is sitting in the back seat. The same rules apply for trips to McDonald's/the park/etc. that are occurring as part of the preexisting social relationship.
 - c. To increase transparency, consider texting or emailing an administrator when these interactions like transportation and social outings occur.
 - d. If Emily allows other young church members to spend the night with her children, administrators are to be notified to increase transparency. The number of participants at the gathering should be kept small (1-3). Safe Sanctuary restrictions for one-on-one interactions apply in this setting, for instance, church participants are not going into Emily's bedroom or vice versa.
 - e. If church participants are going to join Emily and her children on a vacation or other trip, make sure the Rule of Three applies so there are no one-on-one interactions, and a written confirmation from the church participant's parents that they have allowed their child to go must be obtained (can be as simple as a text).

O. Training – Prior to working with youth or children, workers must undergo safe sanctuary training. The Safe Sanctuary policy will be evaluated every year, and

training will be required by persons working with children, youth and vulnerable adults, to Church Council members, SPRC, Trustees, and paid staff.

- P. **Verification of Reading of Policy Statement** – Upon receipt of this policy statement, volunteers and paid staff who work with children and youth will read and sign a statement confirming that he or she has read the Safe Sanctuary Policy.

VI. Response By Staff or Volunteers To Allegations of Abuse

If a suspected incident of abuse or neglect occurs at the church or is revealed to a volunteer or paid staff person at a church-sponsored activity, the following steps will be taken:

- A. The adult in charge of the activity will:
 - a. Ensure the safety of the child, youth or vulnerable adult and tend to his or her immediate needs, as the situation dictates.
 - b. Inform the relevant BSMC staff member/pastor.
 - c. Fill out an incident report.
- B. The informed BSMC staff member/pastor will:
 - a. Contact the family
 - b. Immediately remove the accused from further involvement with children, youth and vulnerable adults – with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the person.
 - c. Inform the Director of Finance and Operations and church's insurance company.
 - d. Determine, in consultation with the Board of Directors and Director of Finance and Operations and Senior Pastor, what to tell key church leaders and the congregation and devise a plan to help the church move forward.
 - e. Consult with the communications coordinator for assistance in dealing with media inquiries and preparing statements.
 - f. Act as the only point of contact for any media inquiries or designate one other person to do so. All other church staff and volunteers will refer any media requests to the pastor or his or her designee.
- C. The person who initially reported the suspected incident of abuse or neglect, or to whom the allegation was revealed, will call the appropriate local law enforcement agency.

If a pastor is suspected or accused of sexual misconduct or abuse, the following steps will be taken:

- D. The safety of the victim of the alleged misconduct or abuse will be ensured, and his or her immediate needs will be tended to, as the situation dictates.
- E. The person who initially reported the alleged misconduct or abuse, or to whom the allegation was revealed, will:
 - a. Inform the Staff-Parish Relations Committee chairperson.
 - b. In cases involving alleged abuse, call the appropriate local law enforcement agency.
- F. The SPRC chairperson will inform the Director of Finance and Operations and the Board of Directors.
- G. The Board of Directors, in consultation with the SPRC chairperson, will decide whether the pastor will be removed from the pulpit until the investigation is completed and resolved.

If a BSMC staff member is suspected or accused of sexual misconduct or abuse, the steps outlined in the employee handbook will be taken.

VII. Conclusion

In all of our ministries with children, youth and vulnerable adults, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child, youth and vulnerable adult will be “surrounded by steadfast love...established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal.”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

VIII. Certification of Receipt

I certify that I have been given a copy of the Safe Sanctuary Policy of Buncombe Street Methodist Church.

Name: _____ Position: _____
(please print) (please print)

Signature: _____ Date: _____

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT (Return original signed copy to staff)

I. Certification of Receipt

I certify that I have been given a copy of the Safe Sanctuary Policy of Buncombe Street Methodist Church.

Name: _____ Position: _____
(please print) (please print)

Signature: _____ Date: _____