

**OLD BRIDGE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
CHILD AND YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY AND PROCEDURES
(Revised and approved 2011)**

I. Purpose

Old Bridge United Methodist Church seeks to establish reasonable procedures to reduce the risk of physical, emotional and sexual abuse of children as they participate in church ministries, and to protect staff and volunteers from false allegations of misconduct.

II. Biblical Foundation

Jesus teaches us explicitly that young persons have the right and the keys to the Kingdom of God. He demonstrated this through blessing and touch. Our goal in response to this Biblical mandate is to maintain a safe, secure and loving place where children may grow.

III. Definition of Child Abuse in Virginia Statutes

In part Section 63.2-100 of the Code of Virginia, defines an abused child as one, who is less than eighteen years of age,

A. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care creates or inflicts, threatens to create or inflict, or allows to be created or inflicted upon such child a physical or mental injury by other than accidental means, or creates a substantial risk of death, disfigurement, or impairment of bodily or mental functions, including but not limited to, a child who is with his parent or other person responsible for his care either (i) during the manufacture or attempted manufacture of a Schedule I or II controlled substance, or (ii) during the unlawful sale of such substance by that child's parents or other person responsible for his care, where such manufacture, or attempted manufacture or unlawful sale would constitute a felony violation of § 18.2-248;

B. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care neglects or refuses to provide care necessary for his health. However, no child who in good faith is under treatment solely by spiritual means through prayer in accordance with the tenets and practices of a recognized church or religious denomination shall for that reason alone be considered to be an abused or neglected child;

C. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care abandons such child;

D. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care commits or allows to be committed any act of sexual exploitation or any sexual act upon a child in violation of the law;

E. Who is without parental care or guardianship caused by the unreasonable absence or the mental or physical incapacity of the child's parent, guardian, legal custodian or other person standing in loco parentis; or

F. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care creates a substantial risk of physical or mental injury by knowingly leaving the child alone in the same dwelling, including an apartment as defined in § 55-79.2, with a person to whom the child is not related by blood or marriage and who the parent or other person responsible for his care knows has been convicted of an offense against a minor for which registration is required as a violent sexual offender pursuant to § 9.1-902.

IV. Types of Child Abuse

A. Definition

Child abuse refers to an act committed by a parent, care giver 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 are extrapolated from the Virginia Department of Social Services.

B. Types of Abuse

1. **Physical Abuse** The nonaccidental physical injury regardless of intent, threat of injury or creation of a real and significant danger of substantial risk of death, disfigurement, or impairment of bodily or mental functions
2. **Physical Neglect** The failure to provide food, clothing, shelter or supervision of a child if the child's health or safety is endangered.
3. **Sexual Abuse** Any sexual activity between adult and child (or older child) done for adult's sexual gratification or financial benefit as defined in the code of Virginia.
4. **Medical Neglect** Refusal or failure by a caretaker to obtain and/or follow through with a complete regimen of medical, mental or dental care for a condition, which if untreated, could result in illness or developmental delays.

5. Failure to Thrive A syndrome of infancy or early childhood which is characterized by growth failure, signs of severe malnutrition, and variable degrees of developmental retardation.

6. Mental Abuse/Neglect A pattern of acts or omissions by the caretaker which results in harm to a child's psychological or emotional health or development.

7. Educational Neglect The child's caretaker is directly responsible for the failure of the child to attend school or an approved alternative program of study.

8. Bizarre Discipline Any actions in which the caretaker uses eccentric, irrational or grossly inappropriate procedures or devices to modify the child's behavior.

V. Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse

In an effort to create the safest possible environment within Old Bridge United Methodist Church, several abuse prevention measures will be utilized. These measures include screening of paid and volunteer workers for past child abuse convictions by criminal history background checks, and provision for regular training on child abuse issues to paid and volunteer staff members, use of the two leader rule, standards of appropriate classroom discipline and open classrooms.

A. Six Month Rule

Old Bridge United Methodist Church will not use anyone as a volunteer leader for children or youth ministries in the church unless such person has had continuous active involvement in the church for at least six (6) months. If they have been active in another church and have had a criminal background check performed there, that may be obtained and the 6 month rule will not apply.

B. Staff Screening

Before beginning the first year of service, each employed or volunteer leader for children or youth ministries, children or youth teacher, child care worker, or youth worker will be asked to sign a statement indicating that he/she has never been convicted of child abuse or a violent crime nor had such a conviction expunged. Also, the screening form will ask for the following: general information, criminal convictions, prior church membership, prior church volunteer work, and prior experience with children or youth. Anyone who has had a child abuse conviction or violent crime conviction as well as anyone refusing to sign the statement will not be permitted to work with children or youth. Each applicant shall also

undergo a multi-state criminal record check. The church will cover the cost of these checks.

Persons with substance abuse convictions or any other prior convictions not including violent crimes or child abuse will be reviewed on a case by case basis. The final decision will be left to the discretion of Old Bridge United Methodist Church leadership. Within three months of the adoption of this policy, all existing leaders and workers with children and youth will comply with this paragraph in order to continue in their positions. The Pastor or his appointee will maintain these records in a safe and confidential file at Old Bridge United Methodist Church. The criminal record checks will be updated every 5 years.

C. Staff/Volunteer Training

Before beginning their service, all paid and volunteer leaders, child care workers, children and youth Sunday School teachers and youth workers will be required to complete an online training (http://www.vcu.edu/vista/training/va_teachers). They will also be required to read the church's child protection policy 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 online training is complete and the policy has been read and the form signed. Leaders and all individuals working with children and youth will be required to attend regularly scheduled training sessions offered by the church on child protection.

Leaders of community groups of children or youth, who use the church facility, including its outdoor facilities, would be required to read the policy and sign the acknowledgment form. They would also be required to have a church or state approved child protection training. Church facilities, including outdoor facilities, will not be available to groups whose leaders refuse to read and sign the policy.

D. Two Adult Rule

Leaders will be assigned in teams of two or more for all children or youth activities. If two of these leaders are related adults age 18 or older, they must have another unrelated adult with them. This unrelated adult must also have a current background check as well as current child protection training. The adult leaders must be at least 5 years older than the children and youth they are with. If the group is divided, each subgroup will have two leaders. If there are not two leaders available for each group, then either the group will be combined with another group to make possible the presence of two leaders, visual access must be obtainable to the group by other adults present or the activity will be canceled on that occasion. Community groups of children or youth who meet at the church must have two or more leaders present who have signed this form. If any group stays overnight at the church, or if a church sponsored group leaves the premises, two or more leaders must be present and must include at least one male and one female not related by marriage, if the group is mixed in gender.

E. Staff-to-children ratio requirements. 22 VAC 15-30-440.

The following ratios of staff to children are required wherever children are in care:

Newborn- 16 months: one staff member for every four children

16 months old to two years: one staff member for every five children

Two-year-old children: one staff member for every eight children

Children from three years to the age of eligibility to attend public school, (five years by September 30): one staff member for every 10 children

Children from eligibility to attend public school through eight years: one staff member for every 18 children

Children from 9 years through 12 years, one staff member for every 20 children

F. One-on-One Mentoring or Consultation

All one-on-one mentoring or consultation between an adult and a child will be conducted in a room or area that is in plain view of others with people present.

G. Classroom Discipline

All leaders and workers with children and youth will use the following discipline measures. If a child is behaving inappropriately, the leader or worker will tell the child specifically what he/she is doing that is not acceptable and state what the expected behavior is, e.g., "We do not throw blocks. We use blocks for building." If this measure is not effective, the child will be guided to another activity. If inappropriate behavior continues, the child may be placed at a table to work alone away from the other students. If the child's disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, the child may be taken to the Children's Ministry Director on duty or the primary leader for the activity and left under his or her supervision. No physical punishment or verbal abuse, e.g., ridicule, are to be used at any time. If isolating the child within the classroom or removal of the child from the room becomes necessary, the situation will be discussed with the child's parents or guardian as soon as possible. An incident report should be filled out by the leader and signed by the parent. This report should then be given to the Children's Ministry or Youth Leader.

H. Open Classrooms

Classrooms or child care rooms may be visited without prior notice by church staff, parents, or other volunteer church workers, e.g., Sunday School Superintendent, at any time. Brief observations of child care rooms and classrooms of children or youth are conducted by the Children's Ministry Director or the primary leader during all activities.

I. Child Protection Committee

The Charge Conference, upon nomination by the Nominations & Personnel Committee, shall annually elect a Child Protection Committee. The membership of the Child Protection Committee shall include the pastor and not less than three or more than five members of the church. The Child Protection Committee shall annually review and propose any revisions to this Policy, and shall be responsible for the administration and interpretations of this Policy.

VI. **Procedures for Reporting Inappropriate Behavior or Abuse and Behavior Giving Rise to a Suspicion of Abuse or Neglect**

Generally those who observe others' inappropriate behavior are frequently very troubled by what they have seen and often have questions regarding the appropriate course of action to take. These procedures are designed to: (1) provide reassurance to those who have observed such behavior, by setting forth the appropriate actions to be taken; (2) establish courses of action that are in accordance with the Statutes of the Commonwealth of Virginia; and (3) ensure that these actions are consistent with the notification requirements promulgated by the 1992 General Conference of the United Methodist Church and the Virginia Conference Policy on Sexual Misconduct.

A Statutory Obligation to Report

Under Section 63.2-1509 of Virginia "teachers or other persons employed in a public or private school, kindergarten, or nursery school" are required to report immediately a suspected instance of child abuse or neglect. The report should be made 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, although not required by law to do so, anyone else who knows or reasonably suspects an instance of child abuse or neglect should report such suspected child abuse, neglect or exploitation immediately. All reports of child abuse are confidential. The person making such a report cannot be held liable for making the report, unless it is proven that the person acted in bad faith or with malicious intent.

B Reasonable Suspicion

In accordance with Section 63.2-1509 teachers or other persons employed in a public or private school, kindergarten, or nursery school, persons providing full-time or part-time child care for pay on a regularly planned basis or any person associated with or employed by any private organization responsible for the care, custody, or control of children are required to report any behavior when, in his or

her professional or official capacity, a reporter has reason to suspect that a child is abused or neglected.

Staff and volunteers should report even if they lack certainty that an individual has been abused. Neither the law nor The United Methodist Church requires an individual to know, with certainty, or to confirm that an individual has been abused prior to notifying appropriate officials. Moreover, investigating whether an individual has or has not been abused and ultimately whether a report of suspected abuse is, in fact, based upon actual abuse is a matter to be resolved by local and state professionals.

Virginia statutes simply require individuals to report their own suspicions. Such suspicions can be very well founded, i.e., based upon behavior that would lead any reasonable person to suspect child abuse, even though ultimately local or state professionals determine that no child abuse has occurred. Moreover, as stated above Virginia law protects those that report suspicious behavior that is found not to be associated with or involve child abuse. An individual who reports suspected child abuse, or participates in a judicial proceeding resulting from such a report is, under Virginia law, immune from any civil or criminal liability in connection with the report or participation. The only requirement for such immunity is that the individual reporting or participating in the judicial proceeding cannot be proven to "have acted in bad faith or with malicious intent." In other words, Staff and Volunteers cannot be held liable for notifying officials regarding suspected abuse the individual reporting the behavior honestly suspects that an individual has been abused.

D Reporting Procedures

1. Inappropriate Behavior – Certain adult behavior, while inappropriate, does not lead a reasonable person to suspect that a child has been or is currently being abused; and therefore, does not require notification of local or state or church officials. Nevertheless, such behavior must be addressed in a timely manner in order to protect children and youth.

Any inappropriate language or conduct between staff or volunteers and a child or youth should be discussed with the appropriate staff member or volunteer who is responsible for administration and/or coordination of the activity in which the individual is participating.

Inappropriate conduct includes, but is not limited to, any action that violates: (1) Virginia law; (2) this or any other written policy of the Board/Agency, or (3) any written policy of the General Conference of the United Methodist Church or the Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church. If either the observer or the individual to whom such behavior was reported, upon reflection, determines that the behavior was not only inappropriate, but also gives rise to a suspicion

of child or youth abuse, the procedures for reporting such behavior to church and state officials shall be followed.

Any reported behavior that is of a very serious nature, although not giving rise to a suspicion of child abuse, shall be brought to the attention of the Church staff member in charge of the event who shall participate in all meetings with the individual involved in the misconduct. When appropriate, prompt warnings shall be issued and remedial actions shall be taken.

2. Suspicion of Abuse

If the Board/Agency staff member or volunteer believes that the child/youth is a victim and in danger of abuse, immediate steps must be taken to protect the health, welfare and well-being of the individual.

3. Contacting State/Church Officials

After contacting state/county officials Church officials should be contacted.

Immediately notify the appropriate Church Staff member and the volunteer responsible for coordinating the activity in which the individual is participating.

Immediately begin to document in writing, the relevant factors and observations. If the volunteer in charge or church staff member are unavailable, the church office should be contacted. All volunteers will be given the name of the staff member responsible for the activity in which they are involved.

The Church staff member shall contact the Pastor immediately upon determining that a reportable incident has occurred or immediately after a report to state officials, Additional contacts will be made by the Pastor as appropriate.

If the incident or behavior to be reported involves either of the persons to whom the report would ordinarily be made in accordance with this section, the individual observing the suspicious behavior shall report the incident to the normal point of contact not involved in the suspicious behavior.

Following notification of the appropriate persons, the Church staff person or the designated authority shall notify the parents/guardians of the child or youth. The parent will be asked to sign an incident report and will keep the original copy of that report (see appendix for a copy

of the incident report). If the parent is the suspected abuser Child Protective Services will make contact with the parent if appropriate.

4. Notification of State/County Officials regarding Child or Youth Abuse

Reports to the Virginia Department of Social Services can be made by calling either the:

In-State Hot Line	1-800-552-7096
Out-of-State Hot Line	1-804-786-8536
Hearing Impaired	1-800-828-1120

State and local officials will require the following information:

Name and address of the child/youth

Age of the child/youth

Name and address of the parent or caregiver

Name of the one who suspects the child/youth is being abused or neglected

Any other helpful information

The reporter may choose to remain anonymous. If the reporter gives his or her name, it will remain confidential unless otherwise ordered by a court. Following notification, the matter will be transferred to the appropriate local Child Protective Services (CPS) unit.

VII. Other Required Procedures

A. Documentation

All conversations and actions shall be documented in writing.

B. Discussions and Publicity

Discussion concerning the reported incident or behavior will not be held except:

1. Between the individual reporting the behavior and the individual to whom the behavior was reported.
2. Appropriate supervisory authorities.
3. The parents/guardians of the involved individual unless the parents or others in the home are suspected of abusing the individual, and State or local officials. No outside media shall be contacted and no statements generated other than the Pastor of the church. Every effort will be made to protect the identity of the child/youth and those accused of and those reporting the suspicious behavior or incident.

C. Confrontation of Accused

No one shall confront the accused with the allegations unless and until advised by state or local authorities and/or the Pastor. The accused shall be relieved temporarily of event duties pending completion of investigation by the Church and/or state and local officials. While the investigation is ongoing the accused if salaried by the Church shall remain on the payroll but duty assignments should prohibit contact with children and youth. Reassignment of responsibility falls within the purview of the Staff Parish Relations Committee.

D. Care for the Victim(s)

The Board/Agency and Church shall extend whatever care and resources are deemed necessary to comfort both the victim(s) of the abuse and their families and the accused and his or her family.

1. The pastor should extend whatever care and resources are necessary to those impacted by the allegation, but under no circumstances should the pastor, church leader or church member investigate the allegation. In providing care to the principals (alleged victim and the accused) and their families, the pastor or church leader, should under no circumstances be drawn into a discussion of the truth or falsity of the allegation which could contaminate the investigation. Do not assign blame or take any steps that involve establishing or refuting the allegation.
2. 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.
3. Observe confidentiality for both the alleged victim and the accused.
4. There shall be a single spokesperson for the Church who shall be the Pastor.

E. Insurance Carrier

The allegations will be reported to the Church insurance carrier following notification of legal authorities and Church officials.

VII Policy Review

The Child and Youth Protection Policy and Procedures of Old Bridge United Methodist Church shall be reviewed annually by the Child and Youth Protection Committee and then by the Administrative Council. A verification follow-up report will be made each year at the Charge Conference to ensure the integrity of the policy and procedures.

After reviewing the aforementioned Policy and Procedures, please sign, date, detach and return this portion to indicate that you have read, understood and accept the Child and Youth Protection Policy and Procedures of Old Bridge United Methodist Church.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Phone Number _____

I have read and understand the Child and Youth Protection Policy and Procedures of Old Bridge United Methodist Church. I agree to abide by those policies and procedures. I have no convictions for child abuse or expungements of such convictions. I authorize and release any references or churches which I might provide to Old Bridge United Methodist Church to provide the Church any information (including opinions) that they may have regarding my work with children and youth.

Signature

Date



REPORT OF SUSPECTED INCIDENT OF CHILD ABUSE

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

2. Victim's name: _____

Victim's age/date of birth: _____

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

4. Victim's statement (give your detailed summary here): _____

5. Name of person accused of abuse: _____

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

6. Reported to pastor: _____

Date/time: _____

Summary: _____

7. Call to victim's parent/guardian: _____

Date/time: _____

Spoke with: _____

Summary: _____
