

**SAFE SANCTUARIES:
ABUSE RISK REDUCTION AND PREVENTION POLICY OF
FOREST GROVE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

INTRODUCTION

The people of Forest Grove United Methodist Church are committed to preserving this church as a holy place of safety and protection in which all who enter are secure in their relationships with others as they experience the love of God.

In our commitment to the Lord's care of and for all persons, we seek to protect vulnerable children, youth, and adults as well as staff members and volunteers.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

Our hope and belief today is that the church is a place where all people will find the unconditional love and care they so desperately need to grow and thrive. But, we know that abuse occurs in churches, large and small, urban and rural. It is a reality which cuts across all economic, cultural, and racial lines. In April 1996, the General Conference of The United Methodist Church adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of abuse of children, youth, and vulnerable adults in the church. It was renewed by the 2004 General Conference (Resolution 65, "Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in Churches, pg. 201, 2004 Book of Resolutions).

As Christians we must take our responsibilities to our children, youth, and vulnerable adults very seriously. While policies alone may not be able to completely prevent all harm, sexual abuse can be prevented. We as the people of Forest Grove United Methodist Church are dedicated to preventing child abuse within our ministry and within our community.

DEFINITIONS

Abuse: intentional, negligent, or reckless behavior by a volunteer or staff person that is harmful, injurious, or offensive. Abuse takes many forms and includes, but is not limited to: physical abuse, neglect, self-neglect, abandonment, verbal and emotional abuse, financial exploitation, sexual abuse, involuntary seclusion, and wrongful restraint.¹

Child Abuse: an act committed by a stranger, a parent, a caregiver, or a person in a position of trust, which is not accidental and which harms or threatens a child's physical or mental health or a child's welfare.²

Physical Abuse: when an adult injures a child other than by accident; including, but not limited to: assault, battery, shaking, slapping, burning, scalding, kicking and strangling.

¹ Wrongful restraint means the use of physical (i.e. tying, holding) or chemical (i.e. sedation) means to limit the movement of an adult for the convenience of a caregiver.

² Harm includes taking a child into a dangerous place. In Oregon, for example, abuse is present when permitting a child to enter or remain in a place where methamphetamines are being manufactured. See ORS 163.537.

Sexual Abuse:³

1. An sexual contact or sexually explicit behavior initiated by an adult, youth or child toward a child;
2. Any sexual contact or sexually explicit sexual behavior initiated by an adult toward a youth;
3. Any nonconsensual sexual contact or nonconsensual sexually explicit behavior initiated by a youth toward another youth including, but not limited to sexual harassment and any sexual behavior by a youth toward another youth younger than and where the initiating youth is three years older;
4. Any sexual contact by anyone toward a vulnerable adult, or sexually explicit behavior by anyone toward a vulnerable adult where the vulnerable adult is unable to provide meaningful consent.

Emotional Abuse: verbal assault or emotional cruelty.

Adult: a person 18 years or older.

Activities: any activity or programs in which children, youth, or vulnerable adults are under supervision of staff persons or volunteers.

Background Checks: researching references and records for indications of past or potential abusive and/or criminal activity.

Child: person from birth until they turn 12 years old.

Person-In-Charge [hereinafter, PIC]: staff person or volunteer who is the person responsible for the event or activity.

³ Generally, in sexual abuse, a significantly older, more powerful person initiates the behavior. However, please note that prevention also includes preventing peer abuse, including behavior such as inappropriate words or gestures, taking or showing sexually explicit photos of or to a child or youth, or exposing a child or youth to pornography or adult sexual activity. Abuse also occurs in similar situations regarding vulnerable adults where meaningful consent is unlikely.

Prevention and Risk Reduction: Risk reduction are those actions taken to lessen opportunity for sexual assault.⁴

Sexual Contact: any touching of the sexual or other intimate parts of a person or causing such person to touch the sexual or other intimate parts of the actor for the purpose of arousing or gratifying the sexual desire of either party. Regarding children, youth, and vulnerable adults, Sexual Contact herein includes, but is not limited to kissing, hugging, massaging, rubbing, blowing on or breathing on, and other touching with any intent by anyone to sexually arouse another person. Forest Grove United Methodist Church reserves the right to evaluate such behaviors and provide guidelines to prevent abuse and protect persons.

Sexually Explicit Behavior: actual or simulated sexual behavior, including but not limited to: words, gestures, sexting and media representations of sexual activity, jokes, nudity or partial nudity, and other behaviors.

Staff Person: any person employed by the local ministry setting that is responsible for activities involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

Volunteer: a person who assists in conducting activities under the supervision of a person or PIC.

Vulnerable Adults: any persons over the age of 18 years who possesses a physical or mental disability or dysfunction that impairs the individual's ability to provide adequately for the individual's own care with assistance, including but not limited to: a) the inability to independently or effectively communicate, and/or b) the ability to independently remove oneself from a situation, location or another's presence, and/or c) the inability to comprehend initiation or perpetration of abusive sexual behavior or physical mistreatment upon the individual's person by another, and/or d) because of the dysfunction or infirmity, the individual has an impaired ability to protect themselves from maltreatment.

Youth: any person 12 years of age or older prior to his or her 18th birthday.

⁴Most policies focus exclusively on risk reduction, and do very little to prevent sexual abuse in the broader community. Forest Grove United Methodist Church is committed not only to lessening risk within congregational facilities and the activities, but is also committed to prevention of abuse by transformational ministry to survivors, justice and equity ministry, and social change. Many professionals who work in the field understand Prevention as applied in three phases: Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Prevention of Sexual Abuse/Assault. Primary prevention engages everyone to keep sexual violence from happening. Primary prevention work is cultural change consistent with the Gospel: God loves each person as God's own. Often referred to as "moving upstream," primary prevention directs us "upstream" to locate the place where the potential for victimization is created through social inequity. This concept is captured in the "Three Sisters" story as told by Lisa Brunner from the Sacred Spirits First Nations Coalition's "Three Sisters" story, recorded by Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence in 2012 and located at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ilyvmXQ3JI>. Each sister in the story represents a stage of prevention: Primary (preventing the violence before it occurs), Secondary (responding in the crisis, including bystander intervention); and Tertiary (addressing the longer term impacts of the violence and supporting survivors through trauma). [Adapted from "Primary Prevention", a paper of the Oregon Sexual Assault task Force, 2014.] Also, see the Center for Disease Control, Sexual Violence Prevention: Beginning the Dialogue, page 3, or link at <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/svprevention-a.pdf>.

PROHIBITIONS OF ABUSE AT FOREST GROVE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Forest Grove United Methodist Church prohibits abuse as defined herein in all forms by anyone who is:

1. within the facilities or upon the property of Forest Grove United Methodist Church
2. at any and all events sponsored by Forest Grove United Methodist Church
3. a staff member of Forest Grove United Methodist Church
4. a contractor working on behalf of Forest Grove United Methodist Church
5. a member of a group which leases or uses the name, facilities, property, or the ministries of Forest Grove United Methodist Church

Forest Grove United Methodist Church supports all persons connected to the ministry and the surrounding community in seeking to engage in healthy relationships, including healthy parent-child and healthy intimate partner relationships. Further, we are committed to equipping all persons connected to the ministry and the surrounding community to be aware of, to prevent, and to resist abusive behavior in all forms through prayer, spiritual growth, words, and action.

ABUSE AWARENESS PREVENTION AT FOREST GROVE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

1. Forest Grove United Methodist Church shall annually designate one Sunday on which abuse awareness and abuse prevention are incorporated into the worship experience. The District Superintendent's office shall be notified as to when this service has taken place.
2. Forest Grove United Methodist Church shall annually offer an educational opportunity on abuse prevention.⁵
3. Forest Grove United Methodist Church shall offer opportunities for survivors of sexual abuse to find healing and support within the context of the ministry of Forest Grove United Methodist Church.⁶ We will provide local listings of available, competent community resources for survivors when needed.

RISK REDUCTION: SCREENING PROCEDURES

1. All adult volunteer or staff persons of Forest Grove United Methodist Church who have regular and direct contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults and/or who act to lead worship or represent the church in an ongoing, official capacity⁷ shall be required to complete an application including disclosure of information including legal name and other names previously used, date of birth, and voluntary disclosure of any convictions of abusive behavior.

⁵ Events will be planned so that issues covered will include diverse and pertinent topics to equip Forest Grove United Methodist Church to address challenges in prevention strategy. Topics may include: physical plant issues, issues related to various age groups, issues concerning abuse prevention and disabled persons, changes in laws, and other issues.

⁶ Such opportunities may take the form of an event or events at Forest Grove United Methodist Church, or combined with other churches, or through the District or Annual Conference.

⁷ Representation of Forest Grove United Methodist Church includes speaking or writing on behalf of the ministry to media sources; it may also include serving as chairperson of committees or for projects.

2. All adults, volunteer or staff persons of Forest Grove United Methodist Church who have direct contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults and/or who act to lead worship or represent Forest Grove United Methodist Church in an ongoing, official capacity shall be required to:
 - a) furnish two references, from persons unrelated to the applicant, on an application form, and
 - b) complete a state and/or national criminal background check.
3. The reviewing body responsible for overseeing the screening process is Forest Grove United Methodist Church Council.
 - a) The Church Council is responsible for review and approval of each application before a person's service begins.
 - b) The screening procedure for each individual shall be repeated every five years.
 - c) All records are confidential and will be maintained in a safe, secure place to ensure confidentiality. The records should be maintained for a period of 50 years.
 - d) Forest Grove United Methodist Church will not knowingly hire anyone with a history of committing sexual abuse on any child, youth, or vulnerable adult.
 - e) Forest Grove United Methodist Church will communicate this abuse prevention policy to outside groups and organizations using the church's facilities and receive written receipt signed by the key contact with the outside group acknowledging the policy and accepting responsibility to comply with the screening, supervision, and reporting/response requirements of this policy.
 - f) Forest Grove United Methodist Church will require outside groups using the facilities to sign a waiver and release stating Forest Grove United Methodist Church accepts no civil or criminal liability resulting from any incident of child abuse or sexual misconduct/sexual abuse which takes place under the auspices of an outside group or organization using the local ministry setting facilities and property.

RISK REDUCTION: TRAINING AND SUPERVISION

1. Forest Grove United Methodist Church requires training for all persons having direct contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. Training shall include an annual orientation that includes information about the local ministry setting abuse prevention policy. Paid staff who are required to attend these meetings shall be compensated for their time.⁸
2. Forest Grove United Methodist Church will maintain practices such that, during church activities, all children, youth, and vulnerable adults will be supervised by at least 2 unrelated adults, and that no adult will be left alone with children, youth, or vulnerable adults out of sight of other adults.⁹ The minimum activity environment standard shall be a space that is either open or provides an open door or window with clear sight lines such that activities can be observed by an adult who is assigned to periodically observe the activities.
3. During activities, no person shall supervise any age group of children or youth unless he or she is at least 5 years older than the children or youth.

⁸ This training may be incorporated in the educational opportunity set forth in the section above entitled ABUSE AWARENESS PREVENTION AT FOREST GROVE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH under section #2, but must include Primary Prevention training and a review of this policy.

⁹ Bathroom breaks with children old enough to self-manage, youth, and vulnerable adults are to be coordinated in such a way that an adult checks the bathroom, then leaves and stands outside as children, youth, or vulnerable adults of the same sex use the bathroom. No adult is to enter during the time the bathroom is in use unless there are clear indications of an emergency. For babies and younger children, two unrelated adults must be present when diapers are being changed or at any time a child needs to have clothing changed.

4. The Person In Charge of any activity shall be responsible for adherence to the supervision requirements herein.

REPORTING AND RESPONSE TO INCIDENT/ALLEGATION

1. Forest Grove United Methodist Church requires immediate and specific response to allegations of abuse:¹⁰
 - a) within the facilities of Forest Grove United Methodist Church or
 - b) at any and all events sponsored by Forest Grove United Methodist Church or
 - c) if the adult who observed the abuse is a current staff member, PIC, or volunteer of Forest Grove United Methodist Church

2. Any **adult** who observes or hears of alleged abuse which falls under conditions described herein [see #1, a, b, or c immediately above] shall;
 - a) assure the safety of the victim:
 - i) by taking whatever the victim says seriously
 - ii) by making sure that the victim is in a safe place and is watched over
 - iii) by removing the alleged abuser from further interaction with children and youth until the alleged accusation can be investigated
 - b) call police at 911 if there is an immediate risk
 - c) report the incident immediately to supervisors: to the Person In Charge or the Pastor, whomever is most accessible, and assuming neither is implicated; the Person In Charge shall promptly notify the Pastor of the alleged abuse. If the Pastor is implicated in the alleged abuse, contact a District Superintendent of the Oregon Idaho Annual Conference immediately.
 - d) If the adult witness is designated as a mandatory reporter¹¹ by state or federal law, contact the appropriate State or law enforcement agency as soon as possible to file an abuse report, then follow the instructions of the agency.
 - f) report the suspected abuse to the child's family (unless implicated in the allegation).
 - g) report the suspected abuse to a District Superintendent of the Oregon Idaho Annual Conference (if not already done by Pastor or PIC following steps a-c above).

3. In the event of a report of suspected abuse, the **Pastor** or a designee shall:
 - a) Ascertain the general details needed to make an accurate report, including:
 - 1) the name, address, age and gender of the alleged victim
 - 2) the name and address of the alleged victim's parents or other person responsible for his or her care
 - 3) the nature and extent of the alleged abuse or neglect
 - 4) any evidence of previously known or suspected abuse or neglect of the alleged victim or his or her siblings
 - 5) the name, address, and relationship, if known, of the person who is alleged to have perpetrated the abuse or neglect

¹⁰ Falsely filed, malicious reports are illegal. However, unless the report is known beyond any doubt to be false, the process of reporting is required by Forest Grove United Methodist Church. Oregon law states: "Anyone participating in good faith in making a report of child abuse and who has reasonable grounds for the making thereof shall have immunity from any civil or criminal liability that might otherwise be incurred or imposed with respect to the making or content of such report. Any such participant shall have the same immunity with respect to participating in any judicial proceeding resulting from such report." (Or.Rev.Stat. Ann. 419B.025)

¹¹ See **Appendix: Mandatory Reporters**

6) any other information known to the person making the report that would be helpful to the investigation of the alleged abuse

- b) Write an incident report within 24 hours of being notified of the alleged abuse
- c) Contact the appropriate State or law enforcement agency as soon as possible to file the abuse report and provide the aforementioned information, then follow the instructions of the agency.
- d. Report suspected child abuse to the child’s family, unless implicated in the allegation or otherwise instructed by the State or law enforcement agency.
- e) Report the suspected abuse to a District Superintendent of the Oregon Idaho Annual Conference within 24 hours of being notified of the alleged abuse.

4. Discreetly exclude the alleged perpetrator(s) from current and future events involving children, youth, and vulnerable adults as investigation into the incident proceeds and until the incident is resolved.

POLICY REVIEW AND DISTRICT REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

This abuse prevention policy will be reviewed annually at the charge conference. An electronic and/or written copy of the current policy will be provided each year to the District Office.

CONCLUSION

In all of our ministries we are committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child, youth, and vulnerable adult is “surrounded by steadfast love . . . established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal” (Baptismal Covenant II, United Methodist Hymnal, pg. 44)

Policy Effective Date: August 1, 2014
Policy Reviewed and Updated: December 1, 2017

Pastor

Staff/Parish Relations Committee Chair

Board of Trustees Chair

Church Council Chair/Lay Leader

