

Willow Hill United Methodist Church Safe Sanctuaries Policy

I. Purpose Statement

The purpose of this Safe Sanctuaries policy is to create a safe environment where vulnerable persons are protected from undue risk of verbal, physical, and sexual abuse and misconduct. It also serves to ensure that staff, paid and volunteer, have clear guidelines which help to protect them from false accusations.

II. Definitions

Vulnerable person: Any person under eighteen years of age or an adult who has a physical or mental condition that substantially impairs their ability to care for their own needs

Adult: Any individual ages 18 or over

Youth: Any individual ages 12-17

Child: Any individual under the age of 12

Sponsored event: Any event organized by Willow Hill or non-Willow Hill event to which a church leader is taking a group from Willow Hill

Safe Sanctuaries Team: Group of 3-5 adults, appointed by the Nurture Ministry Team, who will implement and oversee the Safe Sanctuaries policy, which includes maintaining private records stored in a locked file at the church

Inappropriate conduct: Physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, harassment, or neglect

III. Scope of Policy

This policy shall apply to all activities sponsored by Willow Hill United Methodist Church regardless of location. Additionally, outside groups utilizing the church's facilities shall be required to adhere to this policy or provide a written copy of an equivalent policy from their sponsoring organization.

IV. Training, Screening, and Selection of Staff (employees and volunteers)

The Safe Sanctuaries Team must approve all adults and youth who work with vulnerable persons.

All adults who work with vulnerable persons must have a valid background check on file. Background checks will remain valid for no longer than three years. Any who have history or conviction of inappropriate conduct with vulnerable persons are not allowed to serve in church-related activities or programs with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

All adults who work with vulnerable persons must be regular attenders of Willow Hill for a minimum of six months before serving as a teacher or leader of vulnerable persons, unless this requirement is waived for an individual by the Safe Sanctuaries Team.

Willow Hill will provide annual Safe Sanctuaries training for all who work with vulnerable persons in the church.

V. Supervision of Vulnerable Persons

All adults who work with youth must be at least 5 years older than the oldest youth in the program.

When supervising a group of children or youth, there must be a minimum of two adults present or one with the group and one in the near vicinity.

When supervising a group of mixed genders, it is desirable to have an adult of each gender present.

When a child, age six or younger, needs to use the restroom, two adults should be in the vicinity.

When supervising children or youth off-site, volunteers or staff will have emergency contact information for everyone in their care.

When supervising overnight events, adults will not share a bed with any vulnerable person and will not sleep in the same room with vulnerable persons of the opposite gender.

When working with vulnerable adults at Willow Hill sponsored events, volunteers must abide by the host facility's guidelines and procedures.

VI. Response and Reporting

Discrete and confidential reporting of suspected abuse is critical to abuse prevention. If someone suspects, observes or learns of harm to a vulnerable person or inappropriate conduct or relationships between an adult and a vulnerable person under the church's care, these guidelines should be followed:

If necessary, secure the safety of the vulnerable person.

Show care and support by taking the allegations seriously and extend pastoral resources.

Immediately notify the staff person related to that ministry area and the Directing Pastor. The official spokesperson for Willow Hill UMC is the Directing Pastor or person designated by the Pastor. Under the Pastor's direction and if necessary, consultation will be made with an attorney, the church's insurance agent, and the appropriate abuse hotline.

All efforts in responding to the incident must be documented. Each person observing the incident will produce a written record of their witness and action taken. These reports will remain confidential and be kept in the church office. The staff person or Pastor is also to keep a written record noting the time and process of notification as well as all information gathered and the process of gathering information. This record will also remain confidential and be kept in the church office.

The official spokesperson shall contact the proper civil authorities following the guidance of the church's insurance company and attorney. In-depth investigations should be left to the professionals.

All inquiries or requests for information from parents, DCFS, the media, attorneys, or any other parties shall be referred to the Directing Pastor or official spokesperson.

VII. Registered Sex Offenders

Directing Pastor will meet with individuals who are known to have prior sex offender convictions to discuss relevant terms of the offender's probation/parole restrictions and the Willow Hill Safe Sanctuaries policy, which prohibits the offender's participation with vulnerable persons.

Directing Pastor will assign an escort to the offender for situations where the offender may encounter vulnerable persons during church events, such as worship services or classes.

Directing Pastor and offender will sign an accountability covenant stating that the offender will abide by the restrictions discussed by both parties.

The congregation will be made aware that, due to our church's commitment to the community as a whole and the extension of God's grace, there will be ex-offenders worshipping with us.

VIII. Review of Policy

The Safe Sanctuaries Team will review this policy at least every three years, or upon a change in pastoral leadership, and submit any change requests or updates to Board of Trustees and Church Council for official renewal or revision.

Adapted from 2001 Willow Hill Sexual Misconduct Policy: June 10, 2018

Reviewed by Board of Trustees: June 12, 2018

Second Revision to incorporate Trustees' requests: June 14, 2018

Adopted by Church Council: June 19, 2018