

SUMMARY OF SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Skyline Church seeks to express God's love of young people and vulnerable individuals and to provide for their personal wholeness. This caring community seeks to provide a nurturing and secure environment for all people.

Safe Sanctuaries is a program in the United Methodist Church to protect children and youth from abuse. Skyline's policy sets additional standards for **children and youth ministry** in order to protect young people and the adults involved with these ministries. The policy also applies to **vulnerable adults** within the Skyline community.

PREVENTION | Reducing the Risk of Abuse

For all ministries with children, youth, and vulnerable adults:

- Appropriate Interpersonal Boundaries are to be maintained between all people so they may experience relationships that are physically and spiritually healthy. Adults must role model respectful and nurturing behaviors.
- Church doors should have a window or half-door to remove the opportunity for secrecy and isolation.
- Counseling requires an open door and other people must be present. Any counseling need of children, youth, vulnerable adults, and/or their families must be reported to the pastor. Limit counseling sessions and refer to a counselor with the appropriate expertise if more than 2-3 sessions are needed.
- All leaders and volunteers must report any suspected cases of abuse or where someone plans to harm themselves or others, using the procedures listed below.



For children and youth ministries, adult leaders and volunteers must:

- Attend Skyline for at least six (6) months*
- Be at least 18 years old and at least 5 years older than the oldest youth
- Complete a background check every three (3) years*
- Have never been convicted of a crime against a child or have expungements of such convictions
- Attend training and complete the *Skyline Church Ministry Application* and *Safe Sanctuaries Participation Covenant**

*Also required for volunteers working in one-on-one ministries or with vulnerable adults.

The following policies also apply:

- **The Two-Adult Rule**— No fewer than two adults (not immediate family) will be present at all times.
- **Advance notice to parents/guardians**— Parents/guardians will be given full information about the event in which their children and youth will be participating. Written permission from a parent/guardian is required.
- **Overnight events**— Male and female adults should be in attendance if the children/youth are of both genders.
- **Family education**— Yearly parent and family education about Skyline Church's Safe Sanctuaries policy is required.
- **Bathroom procedures**— Children < 5 years old should be escorted to the bathroom; a buddy system for children.
- **Unannounced visits**— Classrooms and childcare rooms may be visited without prior notice by church staff, parents/guardians, or other volunteer church workers at any time.
- **Disciplinary measures**— No physical punishment or verbal abuse are to be used at any time.
- **Registration for events**— Parents/guardians of children/youth attending any children or youth ministry event will fill out the *Children and Youth Ministry Registration Form*.

REPORTING | Keeping Everyone Safe

Mandatory Reporting of Suspected Abuse

Children: Child abuse refers to an act committed by a parent, caregiver, or any person in a position of trust (even though he/she may not care for the child daily) which is not accidental and which harms or threatens to harm a child's physical or mental health or welfare. The State of Delaware requires that "[a]ny person, agency, organization, or entity that knows or in good faith suspects child abuse or neglect shall make a report..." 16 Del. C. § 903.

Vulnerable Adults: The State of Delaware defines "vulnerable adult" as "a person 18 years of age or older who, by reason of isolation, sickness, debilitation, mental illness or physical, mental or cognitive disability, is easily susceptible to abuse, neglect, mistreatment, intimidation, manipulation, coercion or exploitation". 11 Del. C. § 1105(c).

Should there be an allegation of abuse at Skyline Church or at a ministry event, the following procedures shall be followed:

- For children or youth, notify parents/guardians of victims (unless the parent/guardian is the suspected abuser) and ensure the victim's safety.
- Treat the alleged abuser with dignity, not anger, and temporarily remove him/her from further involvement in ministry.
- Immediately report the alleged abuse to a local abuse service or local police.
- Immediately notify the Pastor (unless the pastor is the suspected abuser) or a member of the SAFE Team.

Reporting Suspected Attempts of Harm

If suspicions should arise that an individual intends to do harm to themselves or another person, the following procedures should be implemented:

- If the individual is in immediate danger of being harmed or doing harm, call 9-1-1.
- Contact the Pastor to determine next steps (e.g., calling the National Suicide Hotline).

ELECTRONIC DEVICES | Best Practices

- Adults have permission to take away—but not search—the electronics of a child/youth if it is distracting from the activity.
- Adults driving children or youth should not be distracted by electronics or other items.
- Emails and texts should go to a group, not an individual child/youth, and parents/guardians should be copied.
- No one-on-one contact via Zoom, Facetime, or other electronic methods.
- Photos and videos of children and youth can be posted on the church's "closed" social media sites.
- Photos and videos of children and youth can be posted on the church's "open" social media sites if a signed Photo and Video Release form is on file
- Obtain agreement of the parent/guardian before posting photos/videos of their child/youth on any personal social media.

PLEASE NOTE:

This document is only a summary of Skyline Church's Safe Sanctuaries Policies and Procedures.

For more information, please consult the full Policies and Procedures document, available from the church office.

The Bible is foundational to our understanding upon which all policies, procedures and ministries must stand.

"People were bringing children to Jesus so that he would bless them. But the disciples scolded them. When Jesus saw this, he grew angry and said to them, 'Allow the children to come to me. Don't forbid them, because God's kingdom belongs to people like these children. I assure you that whoever doesn't welcome God's kingdom like a child will never enter it.' Then he hugged the children and blessed them."

(Mark 10:13-16)



"Then those who are righteous will reply to him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? When did we see you as a stranger and welcome you, naked and give you clothes to wear? When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you? Then the king will reply to them, 'I assure you that when you have done it for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you have done it for me.'" (Matthew 25:37-40)

The SAFE Team is responsible for overseeing the ongoing implementation of Skyline Church's Safe Sanctuaries policy and procedures. The most recent version of Skyline Church's policy was implemented in May 2022.