

Belmont United Methodist Church Safe Sanctuary Policy

Purpose

Belmont United Methodist Church is a community of Christ-followers growing in love of God and neighbor. This is what we at Belmont UMC believe Christian discipleship is, what we are to be, and what Jesus meant when he sent his followers to “make disciples.”

We believe every person is of sacred worth and created in God’s image. We commit to Jesus’ example of inclusive love, care, and intentional hospitality with persons of every race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, faith story, physical or mental ability, economic status, or political perspective. We respect our diversity of opinion and expressions of faith. Therefore, as God loves us, so let us love and serve in the name of Christ.

Belmont United Methodist Church believes that all persons are significant to the growth of God’s kingdom and should have opportunity to worship, learn, and serve in various capacities to ensure personal growth and growth of others. We seek to provide an environment that is physically, emotionally and spiritually safe for all persons who enter our doors, especially children, youth, and vulnerable adults. We seek to provide a safe environment in which opportunities for abuse are minimized through proper enlistment and supervision of those persons working with them.

As we grow in our love of God and neighbor together, it is our goal is to strive to be a “Safe Space” where we can work hand-in-hand growing our children, youth, and vulnerable persons in their faith and life as Christian disciples.

At Belmont United Methodist Church (BUMC), our core values speak of hospitality, nurture, diversity and mission and this policy speaks out of our commitment to these values as we work to grow in love of God and neighbor and make Christian disciples. The policy and procedures set forth below will apply to all people who provide supervision or have custody of children, youth, and vulnerable adults or who have opportunity to have contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults in church facilities or church sponsored activities. To do our best within our means to protect children, youth, and vulnerable adults participating in the programs and activities of BUMC and to protect those who lead them. This policy contains theological foundations, definitions of child abuse, and policies/procedures related to prevention, response, and reporting.



Theological Foundations

“Then Jesus took a little child and put her among them; and taking her in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.’”(paraphrase of Mark 9:36-37) 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)

The Church, above all institutions, is called to welcome and nurture children. Our goal is to maintain a safe, secure, loving place where children may grow and where those who care for them may administer to their needs in responsible ways. As caring Christians, we are committed to protect and serve as advocates for children, youth, and vulnerable adults participating in the life of our church.

Definitions

The following words, when used in this policy and related procedures, have the meanings below:

1. “Abuse” includes any of the following actions taken against a child, youth or vulnerable adult:

- a. Physical abuse: Any violent non-accidental contact which may or does result in injury. Examples of contact include striking, biting or shaking and injuries including bruises, fractures, cuts and burns.
 - b. Emotional abuse: A pattern of conduct that undermines or attacks the self-worth of a child, youth or vulnerable adult through rejection, threats, terrorizing, isolating, belittling or similar actions.
 - c. Neglect: Any conduct that endangers the health, safety or welfare of a child, youth or vulnerable adult through negligence.
 - d. Sexual abuse: Any form of sexual activity between a child, youth or vulnerable adult and an adult or another older and more powerful child or youth. Sexual abuse also includes, but is not limited to, exploitation or exposure of a child, youth or vulnerable adult to pornography.
 - e. Vulnerable Persons abuse: is the harm or threatened harm to a vulnerable person's health or welfare by a person responsible for the child's health or welfare or by a person in a position of trust, which harm occurs or is threatened through non-accidental physical or mental injury or sexual abuse. A vulnerable person is any adult aged 18 or over who, by reason of mental or other disability, age, illness or other situation is permanently or for the time being unable to take care of him or herself, or to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation.
2. "Adult" means anyone age 18 or older.
 3. "Child" or "youth" or "children" or "youth" means anyone in Grade 12 or lower participating in BUMC programs or activities on or off BUMC property.
 4. "Parent" or "Guardian" means a person who is legally responsible for the regular care and custody of a child or youth.
 5. "Policy" means this document and related procedures as they may be modified from time to time by the BUMC Board of Trustees.
 6. "Vulnerable Adult" means an adult participating in BUMC programs or activities on or off BUMC property with a mental disability or regularly requires the assistance of others in carrying out daily life activities.
 7. "Paid staff and partners in ministry (PIM)" mean BUMC employees, paid workers and unpaid workers (PIM) with regular involvement in BUMC activities or programs for children, youth or vulnerable adults on or off BUMC property.
 8. "Helper(s)" means anyone who has not been an active participant in BUMC's ministries for 6 months, or who is under the age of 18, or who does not meet the 5 year rule described below.

Selection and Screening of Paid Staff and PIM

1. Age

- a. Paid staff and PIM will be responsible for the regular and direct supervision of children. Paid staff and PIM will be at least 18 years old and, when working with children and youth, will be at least 5 years older than the age of the children and youth with whom they are working.

- b. A teenage helper may be present at BUMC programming but will never be responsible for the regular and direct supervision of children. See “Minors” below.
- c. At the discretion of the appropriate children’s or youth minister, senior pastor or church administrator, anyone not meeting these requirements may assist paid staff and PIM as a helper but will not be left alone with children, youth or vulnerable adults.

2. Six Month Hospitality Rule for PIM

. PIM for BUMC programs or activities for youth, children or vulnerable adults will have the opportunity to become acquainted with BUMC’s missions and ministries by regularly participating in the BUMC congregation for at least 6 months before applying to be a PIM.

- a. At the discretion of the appropriate children’s or youth minister, senior pastor or church administrator, anyone not meeting these requirements may assist paid staff and PIM as a helper but will not be left alone with children, youth or vulnerable adults.

3. Application, Reference and Background Checks

. Paid staff and PIM will complete an application, statement of commitment to this policy, consent to reference and background checks.

- a. Reference and background checks will be conducted on all paid staff and PIM with re-screening occurring every 3 years.

4. Minors

. Persons under the age of eighteen (18) will be allowed to assist in children’s ministry as a helper, but not in a supervisory role.

- a. Minors who assist in a ministry must complete a separate application form that will be submitted for the approval of the children’s minister. Parents or guardians must sign the application stating that the parent or guardian knows of no reason that the minor should not be allowed to work with other minors. Additionally, each applicant must submit a letter of recommendation from a non-family member.

Basic Procedures for Programs or Activities for Children and Youth

The vitality of our ministries demands active staff and PIM who use their God given gifts in service of others. The following rules are designed to give a structure to those working with youth, children, and vulnerable adults.

1. Parent or Guardian’s Responsibility

- a. Parents or Guardians are responsible for the safety of their children and youth at all times other than when the children and youth are participating in a BUMC sponsored program or activity for children and youth. This can include but is not limited to worship services, Wednesday night meals, or wedding receptions which are multi-age events, and parents are responsible for the supervision of their minor children.
- b. Parents or Guardians will complete forms required by BUMC for the participation of their children and youth in BUMC programs or activities.
- c. For the safety of your child, BUMC operates under the “adult accompaniment” rule. All children must be supervised while on campus. Parents of children aged infants through 4th grades drop off and pick up children in their classroom or designated meeting space. This applies for all BUMC events.
- d. Children can ONLY be released from a classroom or child care to a parent or guardian or their designee. If parents or guardians feel they need to make other arrangements for pickup, please contact the children’s staff member or senior pastor.

e. Many of our children's programming staff are volunteers, and we want to be respectful of their time. Children who are not picked up from any BUMC programming event in a timely fashion will be taken to the first floor nursery.

2. Two Adult Rule

a. Two non-related adult workers will be present with children and youth during church-related activities whenever possible except in emergency situations.

b. At least one of these adults must have training in safe sanctuary policies and have an approved background check.

c. Doors will be left open and an adult supervisor acting as a "floater" will make unannounced visits frequently when the two-adult rule is not feasible.

3. Clear Visibility Rule

a. When BUMC activities or programs for children or youth are conducted indoors, the room door will be kept open or, if closed, a window in the door will provide clear visibility into the room.

4. Restroom Supervision

a. Only adults with background checks and safe sanctuary training may take children aged infant through 4th grade to the restrooms. For young children who may require assistance, childcare workers will follow the toileting policy outline in the nursery worker handbook.

b. Paid Staff and/or PIM will stand in the doorway while children are using the restroom. In cases where children request assistance Paid Staff and/or PIM may only do so if doors to the facility remain open and a second Paid Staff or PIM is present. No helpers will be allowed in the restroom with children at any time without the presence of a paid staff or PIM.

c. Diapering should be done at diaper changing tables/stations near other care providers and only Paid Staff are allowed to change diapers or help with potty training.

5. One on One Meetings with Children or Youth

a. Paid Staff:

i. One-on-one meetings between a BUMC paid staff and a child or youth that are an appropriate part of that adult's ministry to the child or youth may occur as long as they take place in a room with an open door or a window in the door that provides clear visibility into the room.

ii. Parents or guardians should be notified of all one-on-one meetings prior to the meeting with the exception of cases where abuse is suspected or alleged.

b. PIM

. There should not be any one on one meetings between a PIM and a child or youth except when those meetings are

1. a publicized part of the BUMC sponsored program or activity, such as with Prayer or Faith Friends, in which the child or youth participates *and*
2. the Parent or Guardian approves the child or youth's participation in the one-on-one meetings between the PIM and the child or youth.

i. These meetings must take place in a room with an open door or window that provides clear visibility into the room.

6. **Advance Notice to Parents and Guardians and Written Permission**

a. Prior to children or youth participating in BUMC activities or programs involving sleepovers, travel to locations outside of the immediate vicinity of BUMC property or similar non-routine activities, Parents or Guardians will be given advance notice of those activities and their written permission will be obtained.

7. **Other Policies for Supervision of Vulnerable Adults**

a. For visitation in the homes of vulnerable adults, the ideal standard is the presence of two screened adult paid staff and/or PIM.

8. **Policy for Persons Ineligibility to Serve**

a. Circumstances or conditions that may prohibit a person from eligibility to serve with children, youth, or vulnerable adults include, but not limited to, the following items:

- i. Individuals with known addictions that could endanger others
- ii. Individuals with mental illness that could endanger others
- iii. Individual convicted of a felony related to violent crime and/or neglecting, abusing, molesting, or battering a child or an adult.

b. All persons who are ineligible to serve will receive a copy of their background check, so that they might correct or address any discrepancy.

Outside Groups

Groups that are not sponsored by BUMC will be required to agree to and accept responsibility for their group abiding by this policy while on BUMC property. BUMC will not be responsible for enforcing their compliance with this policy.

Training

Training relating to this policy will be provided to paid staff and PIM at least on an annual basis.

Reporting Incidents of Abuse or Suspected Abuse of a Child, Youth or Vulnerable Adult

Everyone in Tennessee is a mandated reporter. Tennessee Code Annotated 37-1-403(i)(1) requires all persons to report suspected cases of child abuse or neglect. "Any person who has knowledge of or is called upon to render aid to any child who is suffering from or has sustained any wound, injury, disability, or physical or mental condition shall report such harm immediately if the harm is of such a nature as to reasonably indicate that it has been caused by brutality abuse, or neglect or that, on basis of available information, reasonably appears to have been caused by brutality, abuse, or neglect." Failure to report abuse is a violation of the law and a Class A misdemeanor, carrying a sentence of up to three months imprisonment, a fine or both. Those who report and "act in good faith" are immune from any civil or criminal charges, which may result. The reporter has the right to remain confidential and anonymous.

If any recipient of this policy, including paid staff or PIM, receives a complaint of or knows or suspects that abuse has occurred, that person should report the situation to the Tennessee Department of Children's Services by one of the following methods:

- Phone: 1-877-237-0004
- Web: <https://apps.tn.gov/carat/> (non-emergency situations only)

Any reports made to the Department of Children's Services will be documented by the reporter and submitted to the Senior Pastor using the Belmont United Methodist Department of Children's Services Report Disclosure Form for appropriate record keeping. If paid staff or a PIM is engaged in the abuse or suspected to be engaged in the abuse, that person will be immediately removed from contact with children, youth and vulnerable adults in BUMC activities or programs until the reported incident has been resolved.

In case of allegations of abuse occurring in the church or ministries affiliated with the church or having the potential to impact the ministry of the church, the District Superintendent and/or Bishop shall be notified immediately. The Safe Spaces Ministry Staff Person will also be notified following notification of the appropriate state or local law enforcement authorities. Parents or legal guardians may be notified in appropriate circumstances.

BUMC's WeekDay School and Homeplace

If laws or regulations that apply to BUMC's Weekday School or Homeplace impose higher standards or requirements than this policy, then BUMC's Weekday School and Homeplace will meet those higher standard or requirements.

Interpretation of this Policy

The BUMC Board of Trustees is responsible for the interpretation of this policy.

The BUMC staff and Board of Trustees are aware that situations may arise that extend beyond the scope of this policy. Both the BUMC staff and Board of Trustees are willing to address these unique issues. Please reach out to the children's ministry staff person or the senior pastor with any concerns.