

What is Safe Sanctuaries?

Safe Sanctuaries is an overt expression of a congregation in making a safe place where children and youth may experience the abiding love of God and fellowship within the community of faith. We at Athens First UMC want to continue to reinforce and enhance our efforts to be a safe sanctuary by offering careful training on this subject. The training will include policy and procedures that create an environment in which children, youth and the adults who work with them are truly safe. It is about being prepared and thinking ahead. It is designed to make everyone aware of boundaries so that ministry with children, youth, and the adults who work with them can be conducted in healthy ways.

As followers of Jesus, our commitment as a congregation is to make a safe place where children and youth may experience the abiding love of God and fellowship within the community of faith. Everyone who works and volunteers with children and youth in our church is encouraged to attend one presentation on:

🌻 Wednesday, September 23, 5:30 OR 6:30 pm in Hull Dining Room

Please plan to attend one session. This will provide an opportunity of information and training as we continue our dedication to Safe Sanctuaries.

Safe Sanctuary Child Abuse Prevention Policy and Procedure Statement

**Athens First United Methodist Church
as of March 16, 2009**

Our Purpose

We believe that all persons are created with an innate sacred worth. As a church, we recognize each person's sacred worth and uphold it with our policies, words and actions. God calls us to make the ministries of our church safe, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from child abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults can be safe and grow strong.

This policy maintains guidelines and procedures set by the United Methodist Church to help ensure the safety of our children and youth and is in support of social principles of the United Methodist Church which states that "...children must be protected from economic, physical, and sexual exploitation and abuse." This policy is also designed to protect our adult volunteers as well as the church as a whole from unfounded allegations of misconduct. We believe the church should be a safe place for all ages to learn, serve and grow in their faith. Volunteers are defined as unpaid persons serving in ministry with children and youth. Children are defined as those persons from birth through fifth grade. Youth are persons from sixth grade through age 18 who are still in high school. Adults are persons age 18 and older.

Although it is our fervent hope and prayer that child abuse does not occur in our church programs, we must put into place sufficient mechanisms to reduce the risk of abuse of children, youth, and those who work with them. For that purpose, our church shall implement the following policies and procedures.

Prevention Guidelines

The following guidelines will be followed in an effort to reduce the risk of child abuse in our church:

I. Selection and Screening of Paid Staff

All persons employed to serve in any capacity with children and youth shall:

1. Be at least 18 years of age and at least five years older than the age group with which he or she works.
2. Complete an application form.
3. Provide three character references.
4. Be interviewed by a responsible church staff program coordinator and a lay person with responsibility in that area/program.
5. Complete permission form for criminal check.

II. Selection and Screening of Volunteer Staff

Volunteers serving with children and youth shall:

1. Be at least 18 years of age and at least five years older than the group with which he or she works.
2. Be connected with this congregation or a member of the church/service organization for at least six months.
3. If not, then submit references from another church or previous ministry experience. In the event of a combined program with another church, an intern program and other similar circumstances, the Senior Minister or his designee may make an exception to the "six month rule."
4. Complete a volunteer application form.
5. Be interviewed by a responsible church staff program coordinator.
6. For occasional volunteer workers, who volunteer no more than once every six months, a responsible church staff program coordinator will review the application and be interviewed as deemed necessary.
7. Complete permission form for criminal background check.
8. Criminal checks will be run at least every five years, and more often as deemed necessary.

III. Record-Keeping

All information regarding the selection and screening of paid and volunteer staff shall:

1. Be kept in the church office in locked file cabinet.
2. Be kept confidential.
3. Be shared only with those persons involved in the selection and screening of staff or is otherwise required by law.

IV. Training of Staff

The following guidelines shall be implemented regarding the training of paid and volunteer staff who works with children and youth:

1. An annual "Safe Sanctuary" Training session shall be held for all paid and volunteer staff members.
2. Those persons unable to attend the training or recruited for service between training sessions shall be given a written manual including training information and church Safe Sanctuary policy. They will be required to sign a form stating that they have received and read this information and be required to attend a future session.
3. The training session shall include explanation and discussion of:
 - a. Behaviors which signal problems related to child abuse.

- b. Guidelines for the prevention of child abuse.
 - c. Procedures for reporting alleged child abuse.
 - d. Procedures for responding to alleged child abuse.
4. A copy of these policies and procedures shall be provided for each volunteer and paid staff member. Each person will be required to sign a form stating that they have received this information.
 5. Annual Renewal (Review and Acceptance) will take place online or at a regular training session.

V. Prevention Guidelines for Ministries/Programs of our church

All ministries/programs of our church involving children and youth shall be governed by these guidelines:

1. **Two Adult Rule**
 - a. There should be at least 2 adults present at every activity, event or program involving children, youth or disabled adults. This includes every classroom, vehicle or other enclosed areas.
 - b. One of more of these adults must be at least 23 years of age or five years older than the oldest person they are supervising or leading.
 - c. At least 2 of the adults must be unrelated.
2. Meetings shall be held in a room which allows for visibility into the room. If not, the door should be left partially open.
3. There shall be access to a telephone.
4. Written parental permission, including a current medical permission form, shall be obtained when groups leave church property overnight.
5. Unauthorized visitors will not be allowed to remain with the group.
6. Children and youth shall not be allowed to leave the designated meeting area without permission/supervision.
7. **Off –site Events**
 - a. Transportation
 - (1) An event officially begins at check-in for the event. All transportation to the location following the start of registration must be approved by the supervising ministry leader. Official transportation should be as follows:
 - (a) Vehicles must be official church transportation.
 - (b) If personal vehicles must be used, drivers should have personal insurance and be the driver of those vehicles.
 - (c) No 15-passenger vans that do not have rear double axels can be used for transporting children or youth.
 - (d) If at all possible, do not use the back seat of the Church Van to transport persons.
 - (e) Drivers must be 25 years or older to transport children or youth. All drivers must have a copy of their driver’s license on file at the office prior to driving. Drivers should sign the volunteer driver form, submit permission for a DMV check, and have also gone through Safe Sanctuaries training prior to transporting children or youth.
 - b. Lodging Guidelines
 - (1) Hotel Lodging: Youth will be assigned separate rooms from adults. A maximum of four students per room. Adults are encouraged to double check that male/female rooms are not connected. It is also recommended that rooms open to the interior of the building, rather than outdoor and rooms be on the second floor. Adults are encouraged to take a “night watch” shift.

(2) **Dorms or Cabin Lodging:** There should be at least 2 adults (5 yrs older than the oldest youth) assigned to each lodge. If this cannot be achieved, adult rooms will be in an adjoining space.

8. Counseling and/or Meeting with Youth:

- a. Counseling or meeting with a youth “to talk” is important in relationship building. Although, as volunteers, we are often not ‘trained counselors’ we often lend a caring shoulder to cry on or an open ear to listen to. If you find yourself in a situation where a youth wants to “meet with you to talk,” here are some guidelines to consider.
- b. Never meet with the opposite gender alone, always encourage them to allow a 2nd adult to be in the meeting with you.
- c. If you are meeting off-church property, be sure that parents are informed of your meeting.
- d. Be sure that the supervising adult leader in ministry is aware of your meeting.
- e. Always meet in a public place, like coffee house, restaurant, etc.
- f. It is helpful to document your meetings and keep in a secure place for your safety and the child’s safety.
- g. REMEMBER: It is important to know when you are NOT qualified to meet a person’s needs. Please know when to refer them to professional counseling. (Good rule of thumb is: Meet with them no more than 2-3 times and then refer.)

9. Guidelines for Parents, Leaders, and Children

- a. All children through the fifth grade are to be escorted to and from group activities/classes by an authorized parent or adult. Siblings should not drop-off or pick-up children. Otherwise, parents must communicate designated responsible party.
- b. Children should only be dropped off where there is adult supervision.
- c. Children must stay in a supervised area. They should not travel throughout the church building or property.
- d. For the safety of all congregants, parents should instruct their children to walk gently throughout the church building. Running endangers others.
- e. Children and youth must complete a permission form in order to participate (without parents) in off campus activities. A medical treatment consent form is also required. All forms must be signed by a parent/guardian.
- f. Any prescribed medications to be given during an on campus activity must be administered by the parent. Permission forms for prescribed medications to be taken during off campus activities must be completed by a parent. Medications are to be under the control of and administered by an adult in charge. The group will be accessible to parents by way of phone.

10. Behavior Covenant Expectations for Youth

- a. All youth participating in events are expected to sign a behavior covenant, specifically for off-site events. All parents are also expected to sign this covenant, as well.
- b. If there is a break in covenant that involves illegal substances including, but not limited to alcohol, drugs, or weapons of any sort, or if a child/youth violates the rights and space of another child/youth to the irresolvable extent, then the child/youth will be sent home at the parent’s expense.
- c. All other actions resulting in a broken covenant will be addressed by the ministry leaders as needed and as they see fit.

Procedures for Reporting and Responding to Alleged Child Abuse

I. Determination of Reasonable Cause of Child Abuse

1. It is the policy and position of this church that any person affiliated with AFUMC, whether mandated by law or not, who has reasonable cause to believe that a child has been or is being abused as defined by State law (O.C.G.A Section 19-7-5) shall report such abuse.
2. In determining whether reasonable cause to believe exists such person(s) shall liberally construe any information in favor of reporting such abuse.

II. Reporting Procedures

Initial Report: Should any person through their affiliation with this church have reasonable cause to believe that a child has been or is being abused as defined by State law (O.C.G.A Section 19-7-5), whether occurring in a church or non-church related setting, shall act in accordance with the following guidelines:

1. Secure the safety of the child, if possible.
2. Make an oral report immediately to the Senior Minister or Senior Minister's Designee(s).
3. Document any information in writing as soon as immediately practicable, which written report shall be signed, dated, and forwarded to the Senior Minister and the Chair of the Response Team.
4. If the Senior Minister is the accused party, notify the District Superintendent and the Chair of the Response Team.
5. If it is abuse defined by law, immediately from the time of the initial report makes an oral report to DFACS and shall follow with a report in writing.
6. If possible, the reporter, who made the report of abuse, shall be present when the report is made to DFCS.
7. If the absence of DFCS, the reports shall be made to the appropriate police agency or district attorney.
8. Notify the parents unless safety concerns for the child dictate otherwise.
9. Notify the District Superintendent and Insurance Carrier.

III. Response Team's Procedures

Upon being notified of any allegations of child abuse, the Senior Minister or Chair of the Response Team shall convene a meeting of the Response Team. The Team shall:

1. Consist of:
 - a. Chair of the Response Team
 - b. Senior Minister
 - c. Minister of Children/Program
 - d. Minister of Youth
 - e. Member of the Board of Trustees
 - f. Member of the Staff Pastor Parish Relations Committee
 - g. Children's Council Chair
 - h. Youth Council Chair
 - i. Additional 4 Designees
2. Be elected annually by the Charge Conference.
3. Ensure compliance with the reporting requirements of this policy.
4. Coordinate with the Georgia Department of Family and Children's Services (DFACS) or the appropriate police authority or both.
5. Prepare any statements regarding the allegation. Such statements may be released to the media, the congregation, or other appropriate parties.

6. Determine the impact of the allegation and develop a plan of ministry to the victim, the accused, their families, and the congregation.
7. Maintain accurate records of its actions.
8. Balance the needs to protect the parties involved in the allegation while fulfilling reporting obligations.

If allegations of child abuse are made, our response will be guided by the following principles:

1. All allegations will be taken seriously.
2. Respect for privacy and confidentiality will be maintained.
3. Victims include the abused, the family of the abused, the peers of the abused, the family of the accused, and the congregation.
4. The needs of the victims will be given high priority.
5. Full cooperation will be given to civil authorities.
6. The Senior Minister or another designated individual shall be the church's spokesperson with the media. No other members should make public statements.
7. The Response Team shall keep all reports of alleged child abuse "confidential" until formal reports are in process. Records of reports, including minutes of Response Team's deliberations, interviews with involved parties, and written materials specific to each case are to be kept together by the Senior Minister and marked "Response Team: Confidential" or otherwise required by law.

SAFE SANCTUARY AGREEMENT
Athens First United Methodist Church
327 N. Lumpkin Street
Athens, GA 30601

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Home Phone: _____ Cell Phone: _____

E-mail Address: _____

Current Position(s) at Church: _____

I have received “Safe Sanctuary” training at Athens First United Methodist Church by:
(please check the appropriate selection)

Participating in the annual “Safe Sanctuary” Training held on:

Reading the Athens First United Methodist Church “Safe Sanctuary” Manual.

Read Carefully Before Signing:

I agree to abide by the “Safe Sanctuary” Policies and Procedures of Athens First United Methodist Church.

Signature

Date

ATHENS FIRST UMC

ATHENS FIRST UMC

Volunteer authorization for release of background information

In connection with my application for volunteer service with **ATHENS FIRST UMC**, I authorize **ATHENS FIRST UMC** and, or, ACCUFAX Div., Southvest Inc., their agent, to solicit background information relative to my criminal record history. I understand that **ATHENS FIRST UMC** may conduct inquiries into my background that may include criminal records, motor vehicle records, personal references and other public record reports pertaining to me. When requested by an employer motor vehicle records or a driving history may be obtained. American Driving Records will provide motor vehicle records from the state of Louisiana.

I authorize without any reservation, any person, agency, or other entity contacted by ATHENS FIRST UMC or ACCUFAX Div., Southvest Inc., their agent for purposes of obtaining background report information, to furnish the above-mentioned information.

I release **ATHENS FIRST UMC**, their respective employees or ACCUFAX Div., Southvest Inc. their agent and employees and all persons, agencies and entities providing information or reports about me from any and all liability arising out of furnishing any such information or reports.

(Please write in blue or black ink. Light ink won't show up) (DOB is Date of Birth)

Requested by: 706-543-1442

PLEASE PRINT INFORMATION BELOW

FULL LEGAL NAME _____ DOB _____

OTHER NAMES USED _____ SS _____

DRIVERS LIC # _____ STATE ISSUED _____

Name as it exactly appears on Drivers License _____

Please note: If your address is a rural route, or post office box, we must have City & County where mail was delivered

Current Address _____ City _____ Co. _____ St. _____ Zip _____

How long at this address? (Months/Years) _____

Previous Address _____ City _____ Co. _____ St. _____ Zip _____

How long at this address? (Months/Years) _____

Previous Address _____ City _____ Co. _____ St. _____ Zip _____

How long at this address? (Months/Years) _____

SIGNATURE _____ **DATE** _____

LIST ALL CITY/STATES RESIDED AT SINCE AGE 18 AND HOW LONG IN EACH CITY/STATE:
