



**Skidaway Island Methodist Church
Child Protection Policies and Procedures**

“Ministry Safe”

Introduction and Purpose

As a congregation of the Global Methodist Church, we believe that children are a sacred gift to us from God, and we accept our responsibility to both protect and nurture the youngest among us.

To ensure the local church remains a place to allow people to make disciples of Jesus Christ who worship passionately, love extravagantly, and witness boldly, it is vital that the safety and protection of children, youth, and vulnerable adults be a top priority for Skidaway Island Methodist Church.

The Ministry Safe policy of SIMC affirms our commitment to protect our children, youth, and vulnerable adults. The purpose of this policy is to help SIMC provide a caring and safe environment for children as well as adults working with children. In adopting this policy, we express our unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all our children.

Jesus said, “Whoever welcomes a child in my name, welcomes me” - Matthew 18:5

Definitions

The following definitions apply to terms used in this agreement:

Child – a person whose age is between zero and 18, inclusive.

Adult – a person 19 years of age or older.

Leader – an adult who supervises or helps to supervise children in programs sponsored by SIMC.

Child abuse - an act committed by a parent, caregiver or person in a position of trust, which is not accidental and which harms or threatens to harm a child's physical or mental health or welfare.

Types of Abuse

- Physical abuse - abuse in which a person deliberately and intentionally causes bodily harm to a child.
- Emotional abuse - abuse in which a person exposes a child to spoken and /or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty. Emotional abuse sends a message to the child of worthlessness, badness, and being not only unloved, but undeserving of love and care.
- Neglect - abuse in which a person endangers a child's health, safety, or welfare through negligence.
- Sexual Abuse - abuse in which sexual contact between a child and an adult (or another older and more powerful child) occurs.
- Recurrent Abuse - abuse in which physical, sexual, or psychological violations of a child/youth are inflicted regularly, intentionally, and in a stylized way by a person, or persons, responsible for a child's welfare.
- Peer-to-Peer Abuse – abuse in which one child/youth seeks to harm, intimidate, bully or coerce a fellow child/youth with words or actions.
(Examples: Gossip, teasing, hitting of any kind, any form of human sexuality conversation, use of bad words)

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES TO CREATE A SAFE CHURCH ENVIRONMENT

In an effort to create a safe environment within SIMC, the following policies shall be followed:

Two Adult Rule

- No fewer than two unrelated adult leaders must be present during ministry activities involving children.
- If any activity includes an overnight stay, two or more unrelated leaders must provide supervision to a group of children. In addition, if the overnight group includes male and female children, the leaders must include at least one male and one female.
- In addition to a minimum of two adults, there must be a 1:5 adult to child ratio at all off-site activities involving a group of children.

- In cases where leaders are asked to transport students, there must be no fewer than two adult leaders present in each vehicle. A leader who is driving children must be at least 25 years old and not use a cell phone.
- To schedule and secure necessary adult supervision and provide a safe environment, we may require advanced registration and a cut-off to participate.
- Digital Messaging: When initiating digital contact with a child, no fewer than two approved adult leaders must be included. Any digital messaging with a child of the opposite sex, whether initiated or received, must include another approved adult of that sex. This includes, but is not limited to, text messages, social media direct messages, emails, etc. Additionally, adults should refrain from unsolicited contact with children without parental/guardian permission and subsequent notification.

Five Year Older Rule

Of the two leaders required, at least one of the leaders must be at least five years older than the oldest child present.

Orientation for Leaders

An annual orientation must be held for and attended by all current and prospective leaders. This orientation must review these Ministry Safe Policies and Procedures and must require participants to enter or renew covenants to abide by and cooperate with these Policies and Procedures. Additionally, a biennial criminal background check must be completed.

Expectations of Leaders

Reflect Christ – Leaders are expected to reflect the character of Christ while working or serving with children at SIMC by using positive and encouraging language.

Dress - Leaders are expected to dress in modest attire. Revealing attire will not be permitted for leaders to wear while on church property or part of ministry events.

Personal Social Media - Leaders must maintain a high moral standard in social media presence. Inappropriate social media content may be a basis for suspension from participation in ministries. Caution is advised regarding content on personal social media to ensure content reflects SIMC ministry guidelines.

Open Classrooms

Windows must be included in classroom doors. Classrooms may be visited at any time without prior notice by church staff, parents, and leaders.

Counseling sessions

Any counseling sessions between Pastoral Staff and a child or children must be held in a room with an open door or window in the door and while others are present in the same building.

Restroom Policies

When a child is in need of a restroom, leaders must supervise from outside the restroom with verbal supervision. When serving with younger children, no fewer than two leaders may enter the restroom to accompany or check on a child.

When diapering is needed, children should be changed on changing stations with other leaders present in the same room.

Annual Ministry Covenant

In order for children to participate in any ministry (class, program, event or activity) an annual ministry covenant must be entered into by their parent (or legal guardian) and staff. This covenant must contain a disclosure of SIMC's Ministry Safe Policies and Procedures, with each party agreeing to support and abide by them.

Six Month Rule

SIMC must not use anyone as a leader unless that person has had continuous active involvement or membership at SIMC for at least six months or upon approval of the SIMC Ministry Safe Committee. This rule does not apply to paid staff.

Conversation Regarding Human Sexuality

Any conversation regarding Human Sexuality is not appropriate with any child 5th Grade and under. If a youth (grades 6-12) desires to have a conversation regarding Human Sexuality, this must be facilitated by no fewer than two approved adult leaders.

Note Regarding Doctrine on Human Sexuality: The Global Methodist Church Book of Doctrines and Discipline affirms marriage as a monogamous relationship between one man and one woman. Therefore, as part of SIMC, our communication around this topic with youth will be in alignment with The Global Methodist Church Doctrinal standards.

Leader Screening

Before beginning service, each person seeking to be a leader in a paid or volunteer capacity must:

1. be provided with a copy of, and agree in writing to abide by, these Policies and Procedures; and
2. complete an application that includes his or her:
 - Criminal background checks on an applicant must be completed at the local, state, and national levels before that applicant begins service as a leader.
 - All applications and references must be examined in confidence by the Next Gen Pastor and criminal background checks must be examined in confidence by the Executive Pastor. In the event that the checks reveal any charges, crimes, or other offenses, or in the event of any other concerns, the Executive Pastor must determine whether an applicant should be allowed to serve, and whether any limitations should be imposed upon that applicant's capacity to serve. An applicant will be rejected as a leader if he or she has been convicted of any crime against children. Leaders who are found to have committed a prohibited offense during their service at SIMC will be immediately suspended from their role. All applications, references, and background checks will be stored in the Controller's office.
 - Leaders are required to participate in annual Ministry Safe training to review policies and procedures for working with children. An updated background check will be reviewed every other year for all leaders.

Any community group involving children that uses SIMC's facilities must read these Policies and Procedures and provide written acknowledgement that their practices substantially comply with these Policies and Procedures; and a certificate of insurance showing that the group has liability insurance that covers its use of, and activities at, SIMC's facilities.

Allegations of Abuse

Any allegations regarding child abuse must be reported to a Pastor or Ministry Director. This report will then be shared with the Ministry Safe Committee (MSC). The MSC must consist of the Executive Pastor, the Next Gen Pastor, and two lay leaders. There must be at least one male and female on the MSC.

Any allegation of child abuse must be treated as serious.

MSC must immediately begin documenting an allegation and all procedures that occur in handling the allegation.

The MSC must report allegations to appropriate legal authorities if there is reasonable cause to believe that a child has been abused.

In situations where a child is presumed to be in immediate danger, an adult leader may directly contact proper legal authorities. This report must then be shared with a Pastor or Ministry Director.

In addition to the reporting requirements, if the MSC has reasonable cause to believe that a child has been abused on church property or at a ministry event, it must:

- immediately notify the child's parents or guardians if they do not previously have knowledge of the allegations;
- encourage the child's parents to secure a medical and/or psychological examination for the child;
- immediately notify the church's insurance company;
- immediately notify the Presiding Elder in our conference;
- remove the accused from any further involvement with children until the allegation is resolved (but not confront the accused with the allegation);
- extend care and pastoral support to those affected by the allegations (but not attempt to investigate the allegation);
- observe confidentiality for both the child and the accused to the extent permitted by law; and
- designate a single spokesperson to speak on behalf of SIMC in the event of media inquiries into the allegation.

SIMC must fully cooperate with any official investigation into any allegations of child abuse.

Policy Review

The Ministry Safe Committee will meet annually to review policy, implementation, and recommend revisions. Revisions to the policy must be approved by the Administrative Board and affirmed by the Annual Charge Conference.