

Safe Sanctuary Policy

Rapid City First United Methodist Church

Introduction

The general Conference of the United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child sexual abuse in the church. The following is a reflection on the adopted resolution *Book of Resolutions*, 2020/2024 #3354 pages 377-378.

A central tenet of the Christian faith is the inherent value and worth of all children, youth and adults. Children, youth and other vulnerable people are least able to protect themselves in our society and are particularly vulnerable to abuse and neglect. The United Methodist Church is eager to do all it can to protect the youth, children and other vulnerable people who participate in the life of this congregation

We believe implementing a policy and adopting procedures to protect our children youth and other vulnerable people recognizes that:

Our Christian faith and the Social Principles of the United Methodist Church calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to our children, youth, and other vulnerable persons.

Selection and Screening of Church Staff and Adult Volunteers

- A. The pastor in charge or his/her designee and the staff parish relations committee are charged with the responsibility of developing, implementing and evaluating the process for recruiting, screening, selecting, training and supervising non-appointive church staff.
- B. All adults who regularly work with the church's children, youth and other vulnerable people, and each church's paid staff, including clergy, will be screened. Adults who occasionally serve as a second person in a classroom or group and those who work regularly with children/youth/other vulnerable people will be trained on child/youth protection issues prior to beginning their regular involvement with these people.
- C. Each person being considered to work regularly with children, youth and other vulnerable people, whether as a volunteer or paid staff person, shall fill out a Child/Youth Worker Screener form. This screening form is good for three years, after which time a new screening will be necessary.
- D. Screening records will be kept in a locked cabinet to protect confidentiality.

- E. If a background check is flagged, the pastor(s) in charge and the Safe Sanctuary Director will take the following steps:
- Use judgment to determine if information is applicable to the ministry where the person will be serving.
 - Consider whether they self-disclosed any information to the church representative.
 - Communicate about the information found in the check to the person involved.
 - Share the safeguards in place to help them succeed.
 - Share where they are allowed to participate and what level.
 - Keep information confidential and securely stored in case of change in leadership.
 - If significant items are found, make an appropriate plan for continued participation in the life of the church

Training

The pastor in charge or designee and Staff Parish Relations Committee shall ensure that regularly scheduled annual training focused on foundational and current issues of child protection is available to and received by those working with children, youth and other vulnerable people. Attendance at this training shall be required prior to involvement in affected areas of ministry by all paid staff members, screened and unscreened adults, and youth helpers who work consistently with children, youth, and other vulnerable people.

The training should include:

- The definition and recognition of child abuse.
- The church's policy and procedures on child abuse and the reasons for having them.
- The need to maintain a positive classroom environment, including appropriate discipline and age level characteristics.
- The appropriate behavior for teachers and leaders of child/youth events as well as all events including vulnerable people.
- Abuse reporting responsibilities and procedures.
- Definition of appropriate interpersonal boundaries.

Supervision

General

All activities involving children, youth, and other vulnerable people will be supervised by at least one screened adult and will follow the Rule of 3 & 2. The Rule of 3 & 2 applies in ALL Ministry Contexts (in the building, during transportation, online communication and while at off-site events with the exception of meetings held in a private home – see below). Volunteers or staff should not be in a one-on-one situation with a child/youth/vulnerable adult. There should always be at least three people present:

- 1 child/youth/vulnerable adult + 2 adults
- 2 children/youth/vulnerable adults + 1 adult

When reasonably feasible, each room set aside for children/youth should have a door with a window. Windows should remain free from obstruction; avoid covering them. If there are no windows in the door, the door should remain open.

Ratios of Leaders to Children

Recommended Ratios for Successful Supervision in Classrooms

Ages Staff to Child Ratio Group Size

0-12 months	1:4	8 kids max
1-3 years	1:6	12 kids max
3-5 years	1:10	20 kids max
6–12 years	1:12	24 kids max

Supervisors should be 18+ and 5 yrs older than the children or youth they supervise.

Open Door Policy

Parents, volunteers or staff of the church will be permitted, as reasonableness dictates, to visit and observe all programs and classrooms at any time.

Sign-in/Sign-out Procedure

Adults responsible for children who are infants through fourth grade should sign their children in and indicate the names of authorized person to whom the child may be signed out.

Bathroom and Diapering Policies - Procedures by age group

Infants and toddlers

- Diaper changes: Diaper changes should be performed by a screened and trained volunteer or staff member in an area visible to other adults.
- Hygiene: Volunteers and staff must wash their hands and use gloves before and after changing a diaper. Changing areas should be cleaned with an appropriate cleanser after each use.

Preschoolers (ages 3–5)

- Classroom bathrooms: If the bathroom is located inside the classroom, volunteers should check that it is empty before a child enters and then supervise with the door left slightly open. Only one child should be in the bathroom at a time.
- Hallway bathrooms: For bathrooms located outside the classroom, a group of children should be escorted by an adult. An adult must first check the bathroom to ensure it is empty. The volunteer or staff person will then wait outside the door.
- Assistance: If a child needs help with clothing, the bathroom door will be kept open or ajar.

Elementary school age (5+)

- Buddy system: The buddy system can be used, with children encouraged to go in pairs.
- Group escort: For larger groups, one adult can escort same-gender children to the bathroom and wait outside the door.
- Monitoring: The supervising adult should remain visible at the entrance while children use the facilities.
- No direct assistance: Volunteers should not enter a bathroom stall with an elementary-aged child or provide direct physical assistance, except under the two-adult rule for help with fasteners or clothing. If assistance is needed, another adult must be present, and the door must remain open.

Appropriate Physical Interaction with Children/Youth/Vulnerable Adults

Love and affection are part of church life and ministry. There are many ways to demonstrate affection while maintaining positive and safe boundaries with children/youth/vulnerable adults. Examples of positive and appropriate forms of affection:

- Brief hugs or side hugs
- Pats on the shoulder, back or head
- Handshakes
- High-fives, hand slapping and fist taps
- Verbal praise
- Touching hands, faces, shoulders and arms of child/youth/vulnerable adult
- Arms around shoulders
- Holding hands while walking with small children
- Sitting beside small children
- Kneeling or bending down for hugs with small children
- Holding hands during group prayer

The following forms of affection are considered inappropriate with children/youth/vulnerable adults in ministry settings because many of them are the behaviors that child molesters use to groom children and their parents for later molestation or can be, in and of themselves sexual abuse.

- Inappropriate or lengthy embraces
- Holding children over three years old on the lap
- Touching bottoms, chests or genital areas other than for appropriate diapering or toileting of infants and toddlers
- Showing affection in isolated areas such as bedrooms, closets, staff only areas or other private rooms
- Touching knees or legs of child/youth/vulnerable adult
- Wrestling with child/youth/vulnerable adult
- Tickling children/youth/vulnerable adult
- Piggyback rides
- Any type of massage given by a child/youth/vulnerable adult to an adult
- Any type of massage given by an adult to a child/youth/vulnerable adult
- Any form of unwanted affection
- Giving gifts or money to individual child/youth/vulnerable adult

Supervision of Meetings Held at an Individual's Home

Any meetings held in an individual's home will be supervised by at least one screened adult, with two adults present who are not members of the same family. Meetings held in an individual's home must be pre-approved by the child's/youth's/vulnerable persons' parent or guardian.

Counseling of Youth, Children, and Other Vulnerable People

In instances where circumstances dictate that counseling would be most effective on a one-on-one basis, an appropriate paid church staff person may meet individually for one-on-one conversations with the knowledge of at least one other paid staff member and with permission of a parent or guardian. During any one-on-one conversation with children, youth or other vulnerable people, the door of the room used should remain open for the entire session, unless there is glass in the door or wall that gives a clear view into the room. If another adult is not in the building when the counseling occurs, the session should be moved to a public place, such as a restaurant or outside where other people are present.

Time Following Group Events

Following group events, it is inevitable that occasionally a child's/youth's/or other vulnerable person's transportation arrives after all other participants have departed. In this instance, the screened leader should wait with the participant in an open, public area and use a cell phone to contact another adult, preferably the guardian in charge of transporting the child/youth/vulnerable adult.

Transportation

Transporting children, youth and other vulnerable people is an important concern. Their safety can be at risk in a variety of ways. Therefore, certain discretion must be used depending upon the event attended, the locale of the event and the age group participating. This policy includes both requirements and guidelines. It is expected that the requirements will always be followed:

1. Drivers must be known to the designated screened adult leader of the event.
2. When a child/youth/other vulnerable person is transported in any vehicle, the driver must be either that person's parent/guardian, a screened adult or a paid staff person who is at least 21 years old.
3. When a child/youth/other vulnerable person is transported in a church-owned vehicle, the driver must be at least 21 years of age.

4. Drivers must have a valid driver's license for the vehicle being operated.
5. Drivers must require that passengers wear seat belts. The number of passengers must not exceed the number of seat belts.
6. Drivers should be advised of a designated route and should not deviate from it except in cases of emergency or road detours.
7. Drivers should not use cell phones unless required for communication with other drivers. Any use should be hands-free and in accordance with state law. Drivers should not text/message while driving.
8. When there is reason to believe it would not be safe for a youth to ride in a vehicle driven by another youth, the adults responsible would intervene and take reasonable steps to make alternative arrangements for all concerned.

Guidelines

1. Drivers should be accompanied by at least one other adult. If another adult cannot be present, the driver may contact a second Safe Sanctuary trained adult via cell phone and keep the cell phone open for the duration of transportation.
2. Drivers should receive training for any church-owned vehicle being operated.
3. Youth who drive their own vehicles should be reminded regularly of the importance of vehicle safety.
4. Any use of a ride-share service should be scheduled by a parent or guardian and drop-off/pickup confirmed by the parent/guardian with the adult in charge of a specific event or activity.

Trips and Retreats Requirements

1. There will be at least two screened adults present for all trips, retreats, and other events where the children, youth, and other vulnerable people gather overnight at, or away from, the church campus.
2. There will be at least one screened adult for each gender present at coed overnight events. At single-gender overnight events, at least one of the two screened adults present shall be of the same gender as the children/youth/vulnerable adults who are present.
3. The adult in charge of children/youth/vulnerable adults for each overnight trip and/or retreat shall carry parental/guardian permission forms, including permission for emergency medical care.

Guidelines in a hotel type setting

1. Separate rooms for adults and child/youth should be assigned with at least two participants per room except where specific situations dictate a different arrangement.
2. Adults should make random monitoring hall trips and room checks at night. This should be done by two adults of the same gender as those being checked.

Policies for Church Media

- A. Facial images of children/youth/vulnerable adults will not be intentionally broadcast on live stream. During church services that are being broadcast, the video will be directed away from children during children's sermons, children's choir performances, or other special performances by children/youth/vulnerable adults unless permission has been granted by the parent or guardian.
- B. Any photographs or videos of children/youth/vulnerable adults used for church publications or promotions may only be used with prior written permission from parents and guardians.
- C. Children's programs will not be broadcast on live stream.
- D. Children's names will not be published in programs and bulletins that will be shared on-line without the permission of parents and guardians.
- E. Parents of children who are performing publicly in church programs will be given a release form for live photography during the event. This form will explain that while the RCFUMC will not use video or images from the performance, other parents are permitted to photograph their own children during the performance.
- F. Members of the congregation will be reminded that it is our policy to keep all children safe. Part of this safety agreement is to never photograph members of the congregation without permission.

Online Safety

1. The volunteer or staff person shall never initiate a connection (friending, following, etc.) with children/youth/vulnerable adults on social media.
2. If a child, youth, or vulnerable adult initiates a connection, that individual's parent or guardian, as well as the volunteer or staff member's supervisor, shall be notified.
3. If an adult leader receives a private text from a child, youth or other vulnerable person that seems questionable, the leader should immediately end the conversation in the

virtual space and offer opportunities to have the conversation in person and in compliance with the earlier guidelines for on-on-one conversations. The ministry supervisor and /or parent/guardian should be made aware of the incident immediately.

4. Adult leaders should post photos on social network sites only with prior written permission granted by a parent/guardian. When posted, PHOTOS MUST NOT BE TAGGED with names or location indicators. All photos must be appropriate and in keeping with the spirit of the ministry event.
5. All in-person protection policies apply to online platform meetings like Zoom, Skype, Messenger and so on.
6. All online activities should use the official church account, not a personal account.
7. Communication about online meetings should be shared with parents/guardians as well as with children/youth.
8. Adult leaders and participants should use their real names as usernames.
9. Attendance of online meetings should be documented.
10. All electronic communications shall be documented and retained.

Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

The moral mandate to report child abuse or neglect is a requirement for all who care for and lead ministry with children, youth, and other vulnerable people.

Any person having cause to believe that a child's physical or mental health or welfare has been or may be adversely affected by abuse or neglect shall report the person's belief in accordance with this procedure. Non-accusatory reports (reports that identify the victim of abuse or neglect whether or not the person responsible for the abuse or neglect is known) shall be made to the SD Department of Social Services : 1-877-244-0864.

Upon the first suspicion of an instance of child abuse, the following steps should be taken immediately:

- A. Do not treat the suspicion as frivolous. Immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the accused, remove the accused from further involvement with the children, youth and/or other vulnerable people. Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the safety of the alleged victim is secure, the pastor in charge or other designated people should inform the accused that abuse has been reported.
- B. Begin the investigation immediately and conclude as soon as possible.
 - If a sponsor or volunteer of minors suspects a case of child abuse, he or she is to report his/her suspicions to their ministry leader and complete an incident report within 24 hours.
 - The ministry leader will immediately pass the report on to the pastor(s) in charge. If the pastor in charge is not available or is implicated in the abuse, the matter should be immediately reported to the conference superintendent. The conference superintendent will take responsibility, acting in accordance with the established rules of *The Book of Discipline* with respect to claims against a pastor. If the conference superintendent is not available, the incident should be reported to the bishop's office immediately.
 - The pastor(s) receiving the initial report will be responsible for confirming the facts reported and the condition of the child/youth/vulnerable adult on the same day on which the first report was made. The pastor(s) will then use the "Reducing the Risk Checklist" to complete the church/staff responsibilities involved with the occurrence.

- Data concerning the child/youth/vulnerable adult name, address, and other pertinent information will be obtained through discussions with the initial reporter and other staff members. The name and address of the person responsible for the care of the child/youth/vulnerable adult, if available, will be obtained.
 - After the information is secured, the pastor will contact the Department of Social Services.
 - After having reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the pastor in charge is to report the incident immediately to the conference superintendent if he/she has not already done so. If the conference superintendent is unavailable, the incident should be reported to the bishop's office
 - The pastor(s) in charge shall notify the parents/guardians of the alleged victim and take whatever steps are necessary to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the child, youth or other vulnerable person until the parent or guardian arrives. The pastor(s) in charge shall also extend whatever pastoral resources are needed to show care and support for the alleged victim and the family. *Note: If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, follow the advice of local authorities concerning notification of others.*
- C. Confidentiality of the investigation will be maintained as much as possible. Confidentiality of the victim and any accused will be emphasized.
- D. All parties will fully cooperate with the Department of Social Services.
- E. If the accused is a member of the staff or a volunteer, the accused will be suspended from the performance of duties involving children/youth/vulnerable adults until the investigation has been completed. In instances where abuse is confirmed, the church will immediately dismiss the worker from that position.
- F. The victim and the victim's family will be informed of the steps that are being taken.
- G. The congregation will be kept informed of the investigation with respect to matters which are not confidential, so that the congregation will hear about the investigation from within the church rather than from the news media.
- H. The church should provide a supportive atmosphere to all those who are affected, offering both objectivity and empathy as it seeks to create a climate in which healing can take place.

- I. Steps will be promptly taken to plan for a response to the media and attempt to speak to the media only through one designated spokesperson
- J. A written report of the steps taken by the church in response to the reported abuse will be kept. The report should be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It should be kept in a secure place. The report should be written in ink or typed to prevent it from being changed.

Reducing the Risk Checklist (To Be Completed by Clergy)

Date:	Initial:	For clergy and paid professional staff: Remove the accused from the situation and suspend the accused from duties involving children/youth/vulnerable adults.
Date:	Initial:	For volunteers: Remove the accused from the situation and immediately notify the closest available clergy/professional staff person.
Date:	Initial:	Make written documentation of everything done and said. If the person reporting the allegation is a volunteer, both the volunteer and the clergy/professional staff to whom the volunteer has reported will document the procedures taken.

Date:	Initial:	Notify the parents/guardians of the alleged victim and respond to their questions and concerns.
Date:	Initial:	Notify DSS.
Date:	Initial:	Notify the conference superintendent to begin the internal and pastoral care process.
Date:	Initial:	Notify the insurance carrier of the incident.
Date:	Initial:	Prepare a written statement and designate a spokesperson to respond to media inquiries.
Date:	Initial:	Provide assistance to the alleged victim and his/her family in obtaining contact information or referral to a mental health professional or counseling.
Date:	Initial:	Respond to the needs of the families of the alleged victim and the accused to seek appropriately redemptive solutions for all involved.
Date:	Initial:	Inform the affected volunteer(s) and paid staff members of the need for confidentiality.
Date:	Initial:	Respond to the concerns of other parents.
Date:	Initial:	Respond to the pastoral care concerns of person within the department.
Date:	Initial:	Make written documentation of persons contacted and action taken.

INCIDENT OF SUSPECTED ABUSE REPORT FORM

Reason for report _____

Date of Incident _____

Name(s) and Age(s) of Minor or Vulnerable Adult _____

Briefly describe what happened _____

What action was taken? _____

Has the incident been resolved? ____ yes ____ no Explain _____

Were there any witnesses? ____ yes ____ no Names: _____

Signatures of witnesses (if possible) _____

Report Submitted to: _____

Report Submitted by: _____

Signature: _____

Convicted Sex Offender Policy

Rapid City First United Methodist Church affirms the dignity and worth of all persons and welcomes all persons to be members of our congregation. However, in order to protect our most vulnerable members, we will require that any member with convictions involving minors must sign an accountability agreement that will read as follows:

Safe Sanctuary

Known Sex Offender Agreement

Rapid City First United Methodist Church, here after referred to as the Church, affirms the dignity and worth of all persons. We are committed to being a religious community, open to those who wish to worship with us, especially in times of serious personal troubles. However, based on your background and personal history, we have concerns about your contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults in our congregation. Although we welcome you to our congregation and our membership, your participation in events involving the children/youth of the Church and those considered vulnerable adults, will be limited to ensure the safety of these persons and to reduce risks to you. The following guidelines have been established to that end.

The congregation welcomes your participation in Church activities, but affirms that you must act within the guidelines set forth herein:

1. You shall comply fully with all restrictions and requirements placed upon you as a result of any legal actions – past, present, and future.
2. You shall not be alone at any time with any child, youth or vulnerable adult that is not a member of your immediate family.
3. You shall not be in areas that are designated for children. This includes: the youth rooms on the lower level, the nursery on the main level and the second floor of the building. If you need to drop off your own children on one of these levels, please seek assistance from staff.
4. You shall not take pictures while on church property or at church events.
5. You will use restrooms that are designated for single-person use.
6. You shall be a member of an accountability group, made up of the Senior Pastor and one other member of Church Leadership or staff.
 - a. The accountability group is a group that is meant to give you support through prayer and discussion of any issues you may be experiencing as well as protect you from any allegations of misconduct.
 - b. When you are going to be on church property at times other than scheduled worship or church events, it is your responsibility to communicate with at least

one member of your accountability group to let him or her know that you will be at the church.

- c. The accountability group will report quarterly to the Safe Sanctuaries Leader. The Safe Sanctuaries Leader will keep a record showing that the accountability group has been performing their duties. This measure is meant to protect all parties from allegations of misconduct.
7. You are welcome to attend any public worship service; any adult Sunday School class or bible study or any other scheduled church events not designated for children, youth or vulnerable adults only.
8. At no time shall you hold a position of authority with the Church or serve as a representative of the Church.
9. As part of our church family and in an attempt to provide the safest environment possible, you shall inform your accountability group and the Safe Sanctuaries Leader if you become aware of other sex offender(s) who are attending church.
10. The covenant must be signed by the representatives of your accountability group prior to your involvement with the Church.
11. This covenant will remain on file with the Church and protected as confidential information within the Senior Pastor's locked files

By signing this covenant, I agree that if at any time, any item of this covenant is suspected of being broken, I will meet with the Safe Sanctuary Leader and Senior Pastor. I agree that all findings of Safe Sanctuary Leader and Senior Pastor are final. I agree that if the Safe Sanctuary Leader and the Senior Pastor finds that any item of this covenant at any time was broken, I will immediately discontinue attendance at all church functions. I understand and agree that church members have a right to be made aware of the violation. Any violation that occurs that is illegal in nature will be reported immediately to the appropriate authorities.

Signature

Date

Accountability Group Rep Signature

Date

Senior Pastor Signature

Date

Leader Covenant Statement

The congregation of Rapid City First United Methodist Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, other vulnerable people, staff, and volunteers who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the church. The following policy statement reflects our congregation's commitment to preserving this church as a holy place of safety and protection for all who would enter and as a place in which all people can experience the love of God through relationships with others.

No adult who has been convicted of child abuse (either sexual abuse, physical abuse or emotional abuse) shall work with children, youth or other vulnerable people in any church-sponsored activity.

All adults involved with children, youth or other vulnerable people of our church shall observe the Safe Sanctuary Policy at all times.

All adults involved with children, youth and/or other vulnerable people of our church shall attend regular training and educational events provided by the church to keep volunteers informed of church policies and laws regarding abuse and neglect of children, youth and other vulnerable people.

All adults involved with children, youth and/or other vulnerable people of our church shall immediately report to the supervisor any behavior that seems abusive or inappropriate.

Please answer each of the following questions:

Do you agree to observe and abide by all church policies regarding working in ministries with children, youth and other vulnerable people? ____ Yes ____ No

1. I have read this Leader Covenant, and I agree to observe and abide by the policies set forth above. ____ Yes ____ No

Signature

Date

Print Name

