



6635 Loveland-Miamiville Rd Loveland, OH 45140 | [www.epiphanyumc.org](http://www.epiphanyumc.org)

### **BEHAVIORAL ETHICS & SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY**

The following policy has been enacted by Epiphany United Methodist Church to align our church with the Safe Sanctuary Guidelines of the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church. This policy is intended to protect both children, adolescents and adults ensuring a safe-space where all people can gather to worship and engage in the ministries and life of the church.

#### **SECTION I – DEFINITION OF CHILD ABUSE:**

I. In Accordance with Section 2919.22 of the Ohio Revised Code:

- a. No person who is the parent, guardian, custodian, person having custody or control, or person in *loco parentis* of a child under eighteen years of age or a mentally or physically handicapped child under twenty-one years of age, shall create a substantial risk to the health or safety of the child, by violating a duty of care, protection, or support. It is not a violation of duty of care, protection, or support under this division when the parent, guardian, custodian, or person having custody or control of a child treats the physical or mental illness or defect of the child by spiritual means through prayer alone, in accordance with tenets of a recognized religious body.
- b. No person shall do any of the following to a child under eighteen years of age (“children”) or a mentally or physically handicapped child under twenty-one years of age:
  - i. Abuse the child;
  - ii. Torture or cruelly abuse the child;
  - iii. Administer corporal punishment or other physical disciplinary measure, or physically restrain the child in a cruel manner or for a prolonged period, which punishment, discipline, or restraint is excessive under the circumstances and creates a substantial risk of serious physical harm to the child.
  - iv. Repeatedly administer unwarranted disciplinary measures to the child, when there is a substantial risk that such conduct, if continued, will seriously impair or retard the child’s mental health or development;
  - v. Entice, coerce, permit, encourage, compel, hire, employ, use, or allow the child to act, model, or in any other way participate in or be photographed for, the production, presentation, dissemination, or advertisement of any material or performance that the offender knows or reasonably should know is obscene, is sexually oriented matter, or is nudity-oriented matter.

## **SECTION II – GENERAL DEFINITIONS & GUIDELINES:**

### I. Types of Abuse:

- a. Physical Abuse - Abuse in which a person deliberately and intentionally causes bodily harm to an individual. Examples may include: violent battery with a weapon (knife, belt, strap, and so forth), burning, shaking, choking, fracturing bones, and any of a wide variety of non-accidental injuries to a child's body.
- b. Emotional Abuse - Abuse in which a person exposes an individual to spoken and/or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty. Emotional abuse sends a message to the individual of worthlessness, badness, and being not only unloved, but undeserving of love and care. Individuals exposed to emotional abuse may have experience being locked in a closet, being deprived of any sign of affection, being constantly told they are bad or stupid, or being allowed or forced to abuse substances. Emotional abuse is often very difficult to prove and is devastating to the victim.
- c. Neglect - Abuse in which a person endangers another individual's health, safety, or welfare through negligence. Neglect may include withholding food, clothing, medical care, education, and even affection and affirmation of an individual's self worth. This is perhaps the most common form of abuse.
- d. Sexual Abuse - Abuse in which forced sexual contact between a person and an individual occurs. Sexual contact is forced when the individual is not capable of consenting to or resisting such contact and/or sexual acts. Often, the individual is physically and psychologically dependent upon the perpetrator of the abuse. Examples of sexual abuse may include fondling, intercourse, incest, and the exploitation of and exposure to child pornography or prostitution.
- e. Elder Abuse- Any act that causes harm or creates a risk of harm to a vulnerable older person by someone in a relationship of trust to that person. It also is the failure of a caregiver to provide for the basic needs of an older person or to protect the older person from harm. Finally, in Ohio and many other states, elder abuse includes the failure of the older person to provide such basic needs for him or herself because of impairment or other limitations, such as poverty. (Ohio Elder Abuse Task Force Report-2005)
- f. Vulnerable Adult Abuse – Abuse in which an adult who lacks the capacity to make decisions, and as a result cannot protect themselves or their assets, is exploited and/or neglected. (US Administration on Aging- [http://www.ncea.aoa.gov/main\\_site/library/cane/CANE\\_Series/CANE\\_guardianship.aspx](http://www.ncea.aoa.gov/main_site/library/cane/CANE_Series/CANE_guardianship.aspx))

II. The victim is NEVER responsible for causing the abuse, and the victim is NEVER to be blamed for the abuse. The victim is never capable of consent to abusive behavior, either legally or morally. Sexual abuse is always wrong, and is solely the responsibility of the abuser.

III. The church must and certainly can work to assure children and families that abusive individuals will not be tolerated or ignored in the community of faith. The church will demonstrate this through commitment of providing a safe, secure place where all children can grow in faith and wisdom by seriously addressing the need to develop and implement abuse prevention policies and strategies for the congregation.

IV. Indicators of Abuse:

- a. Persons suffering abuse often will not tell anyone about it. Therefore, it is important to be able to recognize other signs of abuse. When these indicators are observed in a child, they can be considered as warnings and lead to the looking into the situation further.
- b. Possible Signs of Physical Abuse:
  - i. Hostile and aggressive behavior towards others.
  - ii. Fearfulness of others.
  - iii. Destructive behavior of self, others, and/or property.
  - iv. Inexplicable fractures or bruises inappropriate for a person's development stage.
  - v. Burns, facial injuries, pattern of repetitious bruises.
- c. Possible Signs of Emotional Abuse:
  - i. Exhibits severe depression and/or withdrawal.
  - ii. Exhibits severe lack of self-esteem.
  - iii. Failure to thrive.
  - iv. Threatens or attempts suicide.
  - v. Speech and/or eating disorders.
  - vi. Goes to extremes to seek approval.
  - vii. Extreme passive/aggressive behavior patterns.
- d. Possible Signs of Neglect
  - i. Failure to thrive.
  - ii. Pattern of inappropriate dress for climate.
  - iii. Beggars or steals food; chronic hunger.
  - iv. Depression.
  - v. Untreated medical conditions.
  - vi. Poor hygiene.
- e. Possible Signs of Sexual Abuse
  - i. Unusually advanced sexual knowledge and/or behavior for a child's age and development stage.
  - ii. Depression - Cries often for no apparent reason.
  - iii. Promiscuous behavior.
  - iv. Runs away from home and refuses to return.
  - v. Difficulty walking or sitting.
  - vi. Bruised/bleeding in vaginal and/or anal areas.
  - vii. Exhibits frequent headaches, stomachaches, extreme fatigue.
  - viii. Sexually transmitted infections (STI's)

ix. In addition to these indicators, individuals who have been sexually abused at church may exhibit some of the following:

1. Unusual nervousness or anxiety about being left alone in a specific church area.
2. Reluctance to participate in church activities that were previously enthusiastically approached.
3. Comments such as “I do not want to be alone with *(name)*.” in reference to a church worker or care provider.
4. Nightmares including a church worker or care provider as a frightening character.
5. Unexplained hostility towards a church worker or care provider.

f. Possible Signs of Ritual Abuse

- i. Disruption of memory or consciousness.
- ii. Unexplained mistrust and mood swings.
- iii. Flashbacks.
- iv. Eating disorders.
- v. Fear of the dark, especially at sundown or full moon.
- vi. Agitation or despair that seems to occur in cycles.
- vii. Fear of ministers, priests, or others wearing robes and uniforms.
- viii. Nightmares or sleep disorders. Any of the symptoms of sexual abuse.

V. Abusers: Who Are They?

- a. Abusers can be found in every age, gender, racial, ethnic, economic, and social group. When they are identified they look very much like us. Some are charismatic leaders, some are very sociable, some are very sympathetic to troubled individuals; some are married and have children; some are young; and some are older persons.
- b. Within our churches, these people may be Sunday school teachers, nursery workers, preschool teachers, children’s choir helpers, vacation Bible school leaders, camp counselors, youth group counselors, clergy, or anyone else.

VI. Report Abuse:

- a. The lead pastor and or Leadership team chairperson will be notified and will in turn notify the appropriate authorities. Civil law requires the pastor to report incidences of child abuse to law enforcement.
- b. No person who is acting in an official or professional capacity and knows or suspects that a child under eighteen years of age, or a mentally handicapped, developmentally disabled, or physically impaired child under the age of twenty-one years has suffered or faces a threat of suffering any physical or mental wound, injury, disability, or condition of a nature that reasonably indicates abuse or neglect of a child, shall fail to immediately report that knowledge or suspicion to the public children services agency or a

municipal or county peace officer in the county in which the child resides or in which the abuse or neglect is occurring or has occurred.

- c. Actions Expected to Occur After Reporting the Suspected Abuse:
- i. The county Department of Human Services or Children Services Board shall investigate within twenty-four hours, each report of known or suspected child abuse or child neglect and of a known or suspected threat of child abuse or child neglect that is referred to under this section to determine the circumstances surrounding the injuries, abuse, or neglect, the cause of the injuries, abuse, neglect, or threat, and the person(s) responsible for committing the offense. The investigation shall be made in cooperation with the local law enforcement agency.
  - ii. The county Department of Human Services or Children Services Board shall report each case to a central registry, which the State Department of Human Services shall maintain in order to determine whether prior reports have been made in other counties concerning the child or other principals in the case. The department or board shall submit a report of its investigation, in writing to the local law enforcement agency.
  - iii. The county Department of Human Services or Children Services Board shall make any recommendations to the county prosecution attorney or city director of law that it considers necessary to protect any children that are brought to its attention.
  - iv. Anyone or any hospital, institution, school, health department, or agency participating in the making of reports under this section or participating in good faith in a judicial proceeding resulting from the reports, shall be immune from any civil or criminal liability for injury, death, or loss to an individual or property that otherwise might be incurred or imposed as a result of the making of the reports or the participation in the judicial proceeding. Notwithstanding section 4731.22 of the Ohio Revised Code, the physical-patient privilege shall not be a ground for excluding evidence regarding a child's injuries, abuse, or neglect, or the cause of the injuries, abuse, or neglect or the cause of the injuries, abuse, or neglect in any judicial proceeding resulting from a report submitted pursuant to this section.
  - v. In any civil or criminal action or proceeding in which it was alleged and proved that participation in the making of a report under this section was not in good faith or participation in a judicial proceeding resulting from a report made under this section was not in good faith, the court shall award the prevailing party reasonable attorney's fees and costs.

- d. In furtherance of these efforts:
  - i. Any report made under this section is confidential.
  - ii. No person shall permit or encourage the unauthorized dissemination of the contents of any report made under this section.
  - iii. Any report that is required by this section shall result in protective services and emergency supportive services being made available by the county Department of Human Services or Children Services Board on behalf of the children about who the report is made, in an effort to prevent further neglect or abuse, to enhance their welfare, and whenever possible, to preserve the family unit intact. The Department of Human Services shall exercise rule-making authority under Chapter 119 of the Ohio Revised Code to aid in the implementation of this section.
  - iv. There shall be placed on file with the juvenile court in each county and the Department of Human Services an initial plan of cooperation jointly prepared and subscribed to by a committee consisting of the county peace officer, all chief municipal peace officers with the county, the prosecuting attorney with the county and the director of law of each city, and the Children Services Board or Department of Human Services exercising the children's services set forth the normal operating procedure to be employed by all concerned officials in the execution of their respective responsibilities under this section and other sections or divisions of the Ohio Revised Code. The plan shall include the name and title of the official directly responsible for making reports to the central registry.
- e. Specific & Applicable Hamilton County Phone Numbers:
  - i. Children's Services
    - 1. (513) 241-5437
  - ii. Miami Township Police Department
    - 1. (513) 248-3721
  - iii. Clermont County Sheriff's Department
    - 1. (513) 732-7500

VII. Servant/Staff Guidelines

- a. The pastor will offer and provide initial counseling to the abused individual and family, and to the accused abuser. The pastor will make referrals for follow-up counseling to the appropriate agencies.
- b. Two Adult Rule:
  - i. Requires no fewer than two adults present at all times during any church-sponsored program, event, or ministry involving children. This will also reduce risk of wrongful accusation for the adults. Adults shall not be related or of the same household.
  - ii. When following this rule is not possible, doors without windows will be opened. There shall also be an adult floater who will move in and

out of classrooms during the appointed study/class period. The times the floater makes rounds will not be posted or known by the Sunday school teachers.

- iii. Two adults will be required to transport children to activities away from the church.
- iv. Exceptions to this rule include pastoral counseling in which a door must be left open at all times and the pastoral counseling should not exceed THREE sessions. In these types of situations, the staff and servants, including the pastor, shall observe the guidelines outlined in letter f.
- c. During special church functions, the sponsoring committee will provide or designate someone to discreetly observe children at all times. The observer(s) will make rounds routinely and observe the area for any unusual or inappropriate activities or events. They will also open all closed doors in the church, and make their presence known to anyone inside the room.
- d. Overnight events shall have at least one adult of each sex to chaperone.
- e. Age Requirements
  - i. Anyone working with children or youth shall be at least five years older than the oldest person in the group. In the event that a servant does not meet the five-year age difference, another person who fits this criteria must be present.
  - ii. All ministries involving children and youth must have at least one adult over the age of eighteen present, and shall also adhere to the guideline outlined in section e.
- f. If a room is being used for children and youth, there must be a window in the door. If there is no window, the door must be left opened, especially if there is only one adult present. This guideline also applies to one-on-one instances outlined in guideline b.
- g. Coordinators of children and youth oriented events shall provide advance notice to parents via letters home, the newsletter, or bulletin board notice. Events not held on church grounds will always require a consent form including a medical information portion completed and signed by the parent.
- h. Anyone working with children must have been active in the church for at least 6 months.
- i. Anyone working with children must agree to not have direct contact with the children or youth outside of Epiphany sponsored events without the direct consent of the children's parents or guardians.
- j. Epiphany United Methodist Church strictly prohibits the use of, or being under the influence of, illegal drugs and/or alcohol on church premises or when working with children or youth on any Epiphany sanctioned event.

### VIII. Clergy-Specific Guidelines

- a. During any counseling sessions with children, youth, or adults (especially adults of the opposite sex), the pastor will observe an open-door policy for the duration of the session.
- b. The pastor will include a second party or notify a second party upon making a home visit, in which the pastor will be alone with another individual.
- c. The pastor will not travel with a child under eighteen years of age or a mentally or physically handicapped child under twenty-one years of age, unless at least one other adult (not related to pastor) is present.
- d. The pastor will not counsel a child under eighteen years of age or a mentally or physically handicapped child under twenty-one years of age without another adult (not related to pastor) present in the church building.
- e. If a pastor has knowledge of a person that is actively abusive or has drug / alcohol abuse issues, then pastor will check Protect My Ministry applicants to advise anyone involved with children to stop serving with children ministries.

### IX. Background Checks, & Registered Sex Offenders

- a. All paid staff, servant teachers, mentors and leaders of programs involving children and youth are subject to a background check once every 3 years through Protect My Ministry Program and annual training every year. All background check information will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the church office at all times. The key to the locked file cabinet must be kept on the church premises and not stored with other keys where the security of the locked cabinet would be compromised.
- b. Any and all known registered sex offenders are not permitted to work with children and youth under any circumstances, nor are they to be in any part of the church building occupied by children and youth unless accompanied by another adult who is not involved with ongoing children and youth ministries. Accompanying adult shall not be a relative or of the same household as the registered sex offender. In the event that this guideline is not followed, the registrant will be asked to vacate the premises and not return.

### X. Special Considerations for Vulnerable and/or Older Adults

- a. All above guidelines are applicable to the care and work with vulnerable and/or older adults with the following exceptions:
  - i. The five-year rule does NOT apply to working with vulnerable older adults (section e “Age Requirements” under the section heading “Servant/Staff Guidelines”)
  - ii. Any children under the age of eighteen, visiting with vulnerable and/or older adults, either on church property or while under the care of servant/staff of the church, must be supervised by appropriate servant/staff (i.e. No child under the age of eighteen shall be left in a situation or room alone with a vulnerable and/or older adult).



#### XI. Local Church Covenant

- a. This policy will be reviewed and revised annually by the Epiphany UMC Leadership Team. The Leadership Team will make available this policy to the congregation. Education on this policy will also be available to interested parties for purposes of training, clarification, and awareness. All church servants, child workers, staff, and clergy will be required to sign a Behavioral Ethics & Safe Sanctuary Policy Agreement Form indicating that they have read and understand this policy. Signatures shall be kept on file at the church and will be secured at all times.



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**BEHAVIORAL ETHICS & SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY**

Agreement Form and also On Line with Protect My Ministry Application.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, acknowledge that I have read and understand  
(Print Name)

all of the information contained in the Epiphany United Methodist Church Behavioral Ethics & Safe Sanctuary Policy.

I agree to maintain a sense of awareness regarding possible abuse situations, and to report concerns to appropriate persons whenever there is a substantial risk to the health or safety of the child less than eighteen years of age or a mentally or physically handicapped child less than twenty-one years of age.

Furthermore, I agree to follow the procedures pertaining to staff, servants, clergy, and/or registered sex offenders, as outlined in Section II. In doing so, I recognize that these procedures are intended to protect all individuals within the Epiphany United Methodist Church community from harm, and to reduce the threat of false accusations against persons such as myself.

In signing this form, I agree that I will abide under the constructs of the above paragraphs, and understand that my failure to do so may result in disciplinary action by the Lead Pastor and/or Leadership Team, termination of my position as a staff member or servant, and/or my removal from Epiphany United Methodist Church.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature) (Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Position in Church)