



ABUSE PREVENTION POLICY FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND VULNERABLE ADULTS MISSOURI ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

The Missouri Annual Conference is committed to the well-being of every person entrusted to its care as well as those persons entrusted to the care of United Methodist churches throughout Missouri.

Scope

Missouri United Methodists affirm that all children, youth and vulnerable adults (see definition below) have the right to safe sanctuary. Therefore, Missouri United Methodists are determined to provide an environment in which these persons are safe from neglect or abuse. The scope of this policy and its provisions shall apply to all staff and volunteers, clergy or lay, who have direct or indirect contact with children, youth, or vulnerable adults, or youth in conference and/or district sponsored events. The Missouri Conference Mission Council, in consultation with the Conference Certification Authority, shall be responsible for reviewing and revising this policy. Each conference and/or district ministry involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults shall implement this policy (see default procedures).

Definitions

1. **Physical Abuse** is any deliberate act that inflicts bodily harm to a person.
2. **Sexual Abuse** is any sexual contact or sexually explicit language, gestures, or images by a volunteer or staff person with, or directed to, a participant.
3. **Verbal Abuse** is when a person forcefully criticizes, insults, or denounces someone else. Characterized by underlying anger and hostility, it is a destructive form of communication intended to harm the self-concept of the other person and produce negative emotions.
4. **Bullying** is unwanted, aggressive behavior among school-aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Both kids who are bullied and who bully others may have serious, lasting problems. In order to be considered bullying, the behavior must be aggressive and include: 1) Imbalance of power: kids who bully use their power—such as physical strength, access to embarrassing information, or popularity—to control or harm others. Power imbalances can change over time and in different situations, even if they involve the same people. 2) Repetition: bullying behaviors happen more than once or have the potential to happen more than once.
5. **Cyberbullying** is repeated, intentional and often anonymous act done to harm another person through e-mail, cell phone text messages, social networking web sites, chat rooms, and instant messaging. It can be perpetrated by one person or a group of people.
6. **Neglect** is failure to provide nutrition or medical, surgical, or any other care necessary for the well-being of the child, youth or vulnerable adults.
7. **Staff** includes any clergyperson, any paid employee of the conference or a district, and any paid employee of any group, committee, team or agency of the conference or a district who has the care/supervision of a participant at an event.
8. **Volunteer** is any unpaid non-clergy, lay worker who has the care/supervision of a participant at an

event. This may also include paid staff members of a local church serving at a Conference or district event.

9. **Certification Authority** is Director of Connectional Ministries, Director of Financial and Administrative Ministries, and one other member selected by the Director of Connectional Ministries.
10. **Participants** are children and youth who are registered, enrolled, attending or otherwise participating in an event or activity sponsored by the annual conference or a district. Participants are also persons who are vulnerable adults.
11. **Vulnerable adults** are persons over 18 years of age with physical, mental and/or development limitations and disabilities. Vulnerable adults include the elderly.
12. **Children** are persons 0-11 years of age.
13. **Youth** are 12-18 years of age.
14. **Conference Certification** is specifically for district or Conference-sponsored ministries because there are additional requirements for supervision at district/Conference-sponsored ministry events (e.g., WOW, National Gathering for United Methodist Youth, Youth Academy,, a Conference or district-sponsored Mission trip, a Conference or district retreat, and district or Conference-sponsored camping ministries).
15. **Local Church Certification** is specifically for ministry events sponsored by the local church level such as serving as a Sunday School teacher/helper, a pre-school teacher, Vacation Bible School, day care, Parents Day Out programs, church nursery, after-school programs, or serving as a cook or van driver for a local church event. Individuals who do not intend to work or volunteer at Conference or district-sponsored events should not seek Conference certification.
16. **Ministry Event** is defined as local church, conference or district sponsored activity or occasion that involves a gathering and care of children, youth or vulnerable adults.
17. **Supervision** is the ability of a person to supervise a group of children, youth or vulnerable adults, including giving direction, setting boundaries, disciplining appropriately, maintaining safety and being the supervising adult in all situations. This includes the ability to take immediate and appropriate action when policies or procedures are being violated.
18. **National Screen** is the conducting of a search of publicly available websites through a third-party contractor for information about criminal convictions of the applicant and whether the applicant's name appears on the National Sex Offender list.
19. **Local Church Safe Sanctuaries Associate (LCA)** is designated by the local church or the district. The LCA will initialize the process of certification, view applicant information submitted for purposes of consideration of certification at the Conference and local church level and shall maintain strict confidentiality of all the applicant information.
1. 18. **Local Church Certification Authority** is designated by the local church and will make certification decisions at the local church level.

Standards for Staff and Volunteers at Conference-sponsored Ministry Events

1. All applicants for Conference Certification must apply; pay a fee; submit references and complete the required training.
2. Applicants who are 19 years of age or older must also authorize the Conference Certification Authority to conduct a National Screen. Applicants younger than 19 will not be required to authorize a National Screen because records of criminal convictions for minors are sealed from public scrutiny.
3. Youth volunteers at Conference-sponsored ministry events between the ages of 15-18, must

serve under the supervision of one or more certified adults who are 22 years of age or older. All staff/volunteers must be at least four years older than the oldest participants with whom they work.

4. A background screening approved by the Safe Sanctuaries office is required for all staff/volunteers at Conference-sponsored events. Staff/volunteers from outside of the United States of America or without a social security number for whom a background screening cannot be completed may be verified through other means and allowed to work under the supervision of a properly certified adult.
5. All staff/volunteers at Conference-sponsored events shall be participants in a local church/ministry for a minimum of six months prior to the event.
6. All staff/volunteers at Conference-sponsored events shall participate in the required training program and may be asked at any time to complete additional training to remain certified.
7. All staff/volunteers must be able to provide supervision (see definition above) to those 18 years and under to be considered potential for Conference certification and thus, eligible to serve in district or Conference events.
8. Conference certification is considered a privilege and not a right. The Certification Authority may suspend or revoke Conference certification at any time.

Screening for Staff/Volunteers

Careful screening is one way to provide for the safety of participants. This includes an application, the administration of a National Screen, the submission of references and training. The Conference Certification Authority must approve all screening procedures developed by individual Conference/district ministry groups if they vary from this policy.

Training

Conference and district ministry groups shall be responsible for providing all training required by the Conference Certification Authority. That training shall include, but not be limited to, the following elements: recognizing the signs of abuse; avoiding situations when abuse might take place or conduct which could be perceived as abusive; and reporting requirements of the state of Missouri and the Missouri Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church related to abuse and media response procedures.

Local Church and Conference Application, Training, Screening, and Certification Processes

1. There are two processes for certification, a Local Church Certification process and a Conference Certification process. Conference certification is valid for a period of four years.
2. An applicant's gifts and talents will vary and meeting certification at the local church level does not mean that an applicant is automatically certified to attend district or Conference events. Conference certification is considered a privilege and not a right. The Conference Certification Authority may suspend or revoke Conference certification at any time.
3. The applicant must complete Conference Level Certification in order to attend district or Conference-sponsored ministry events.
4. The designation of Conference Certification is specifically for district or Conference-sponsored ministry events because there are additional requirements for supervision at district/Conference ministry events.
5. A local church shall not require Conference Certification as the means to meet Local Church Certification. A local church must use the Local Church Online Process or other local church

- processes (including in-person training sessions) to meet the needs of Local Church Certification.
6. Each local church should establish its own Certification Authority for making certification decisions. Examples of who may be part of a Local Church Certification Authority include these possible positions: Director/Coordinator of Youth and Children ministries, Pastor, or Staff Parish Chair, and should consist of 3-4 members. The Local Church Certification Authority shall decide who is certified or denied. The Local Church Certification Authority will be responsible for reviewing policies and procedures on an annual basis and submitting those policies and procedures to the church's governing board for annual review and approval. It will keep records, maintain confidentiality, and ensure that training and screening requirements are met.
 7. The applicants for Local Church or Conference Certification must be approved or authorized to complete the online or in-person certification application process by the Local Church Certification Authority.
 8. Conference Certification requires a completion of Safe Sanctuaries training, an Application form, with self-disclosure questions, payment of a fee, authorizing of a National Screen and completion of references. Local churches will have the option to use a parallel or similar online process.
 9. Conference Certification requires a completed file to be reviewed by the Conference Certification Authority. The Conference Certification Authority will make the decision whether to approve or deny certification for the Conference level of certification. The Conference Certification Authority may also revoke or suspend a Conference Certification should it find that there is just cause.
 10. The Local church process will use an Application form, the National Screen and the online training. References will be optional. It will be necessary for the local church to supplement the Conference training using their local church policies and procedures to complete the Local Church Certification. This should include on-site training related to disaster preparedness (e.g., how to exit children in the nursery during a fire, tornado-safe areas, escape routes for exiting the building(s), emergency/first aid).
 11. Significant decisions of the Local Church Certification Authority, such as a suspension, denial or revocation will be entered into the Local Church Online Process and these decisions will be reported to the Conference Certification Authority for recording purposes.
 12. Local church paid staff and other volunteers may need both Local Church Certification and Conference Certification, based on activity or event involvement, but Conference certification should only be sought if the staff person will also be working in a supervising role at a Conference-sponsored ministry event.
 13. Applicants can be Local Church certified, Conference certified or have both Local Church Certification and Conference Certification, based on the activity or event involvement.

Training and Screening Reciprocity

The Safe Sanctuaries Certification Authority may accept training provided by other United Methodist Conferences or United Methodist churches in other conferences after a review of the policies and procedures implemented in the other conference or church. Currently, the Missouri Conference accepts Safe Gatherings (<https://safegatherings.com>) certification. Screening will be accepted if there has been a National Screen that included a national criminal check conducted by the other conference or church.

Conference Certification Authority

1. The Conference Certification Authority shall be responsible for reviewing and for giving approval for the procedures developed by individual conference and district ministry groups.

2. The Conference Certification Authority shall periodically review procedures.
3. Where screening reports and/or forms are required, the Conference Certification Authority shall receive, review and maintain these reports. Where additional information is needed to complete the certification process, the Conference Certification Authority may request that a personal interview of the applicant be conducted by the person who completed the pastoral/professional reference. The interviewer will be requested to report on the results of the interview and to provide any written documentation which may support the results of the interview.
4. If the Conference Certification Authority determines that the person may be unsuitable to serve, the application shall be disapproved, and the applicant shall be notified that certification is denied. If such applicant is a clergy serving a United Methodist church, agency, or institution, notification will be made to the District Superintendent and the Bishop. If such applicant is a layperson, notification will be made to the person's local church pastor. Information provided by references shall be kept confidential at all times.
5. **Waiver of Right to Review** - The applicant for Certification must acknowledge his or her understanding that by making an application for certification they waive any right to inspect or copy any information which the Conference Certification Authority may use to make its determination. The Conference Certification Authority will only notify the applicant that Certification has been approved or disapproved, and it has no obligation to disclose to the applicant any of its reasons for the decision it makes, nor does the applicant have any right to learn the basis for the decision which the Conference Certification Authority makes. If the applicant is not willing to acknowledge this policy then the applicant may not continue with certification.
6. **Suspension** -When circumstances are deemed appropriate, the Conference Certification Authority may decide that a suspension of Conference certification makes more sense than revocation. The effect of suspension will be no different than revocation, except that the Conference Certification Authority will be able to reinstate the individual without further action required. The Conference Certification Authority shall have the sole discretion to determine when such circumstances arise. As an example, the Conference Certification Authority may determine that certain legal situations generate concerns for a person's ability to engage in supervision, but that with a short amount of time and favorable resolution of the situation, certification might be reinstated.
7. **Revocation** -The Conference Certification Authority reserves the right to revoke an individual's certification at any time. Any reported incident has the potential to cause revocation. Reports of incidents involving the safety, neglect and/or abuse, failure to supervise, and/or to provide for the emotional, psychological, physical, and sexual safety of a child, youth or vulnerable adult may result in revocation of an individual's certification.

Reporting of Incidents

Incidents may involve inappropriate behavior by staff/volunteers or other participants toward a participant and call for immediate on-site corrective action. Incidents may involve the abuse, neglect or exploitation of participants by staff/volunteers or other participants and mandate reporting through the Missouri Child Abuse Hotline (1-800-392-3738) or the Elder Abuse and Neglect hotline (1-800-392-0210).

A call to the hotline is required to be made by staff/volunteers if there is reasonable cause to suspect that abuse or neglect of a participant has occurred. When the necessity of reporting occurs, the protection of children, youth, and vulnerable adults must be paramount. Cooperation with the Missouri

Children's Division, the Department of Health and Senior Services and law enforcement is required in all such incidents. In case of allegations of abuse, the District Superintendent and Bishop shall be notified immediately. The Conference Certification Authority 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.

Statement to the Media

The Office of Connectional Ministries shall provide Conference and district ministry groups with guidelines for communications with media about the incident(s) which may have been reported.

Guidelines for Procedures

1. Every ministry of the Missouri Annual Conference that relates to children, youth, and vulnerable adults in its programming or oversight, shall create procedures for implementing the conference policy. Administrative teams who give oversight to these ministries shall be responsible for implementing and monitoring the compliance of said policy and related procedures. Procedures shall address at a minimum:
 - a. Reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers for supervision of children, youth and vulnerable adults;
 - b. Educating said workers about the policy and procedures, along with ongoing monitoring so that compliance is maintained;
 - c. Reporting incidents of child abuse or abuse of youth or vulnerable adults in accordance with the state laws of Missouri and the written guidelines of the Missouri Conference;
 - d. Dealing with the safety of those who may have been victimized;
 - e. Active communication with family members and public media;
 - f. A copy of the Conference procedures shall be retained in the Conference office
2. Every ministry shall be responsible for providing adequate liability coverage.
3. The Conference Certification Authority shall be responsible for training and resourcing the ministries covered by this policy.
4. Every church in the Missouri Annual Conference shall have an Abuse Prevention Policy for Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults with accompanying procedures. These policies and procedures shall include:
 - a. Reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of both employee and volunteer workers with children, youth, or vulnerable adults;
 - b. Educating said workers of the policy and procedures along with ongoing monitoring so that compliance is maintained; and, using age appropriate languages in educating children, youth, and vulnerable adults of definitions of abuse and procedures for reporting;
 - c. Reporting incidents of child abuse and abuse of vulnerable adults in accordance with the State Laws of Missouri, the written guidelines of the Missouri Annual Conference, and the written guidelines of the local United Methodist Church;
 - d. Providing for adequate liability insurance coverage;
 - e. Dealing with the safety, protection, and ongoing emotional support of those who may have been victimized;
 - f. Active communication with family members, the congregation, and the public media;
 - g. A copy of the policy shall be on file in the church's District Office;
 - h. Administrative bodies of the local church shall be responsible for implementing and monitoring the policy and accompanying procedures.