



## **Policy for Protecting Children and Youth in Church Activities**

### **1. Mission Statement**

Our mission as a community of faith is to make healthy, committed disciples of Jesus Christ first locally, then globally ... that the world might know that Jesus Christ is Lord.

### **2. Two Adult Rule**

There will always be 2 adult (18 years of age or older) leaders present when caring for minor children under the auspices of Mosaic United Methodist Church. Exceptions are:

- Church approved activities in which there is one adult and one or more youth in a room with a window and a door.
- When parents give written permission for specific activities such as cell group activities in private homes or mentoring situations.

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# **Mosaic United Methodist Church Policy for Protecting Children and Youth in Church Activities**

## **Introduction:**

The Mosaic task force adopted the following policies and procedures to help keep our church a safe sanctuary for our children and youth. Fortunately, this is not initiated in response to problems within Mosaic, but is prompted by awareness of problems in other churches that have allowed for the abuse of children by paid and unpaid child and youth workers in the church, as well as by other minors. In no way will we allow these policies and procedures to interfere with our service of Christ; they will enhance it.

Many of today's parents are accustomed to these considerations in their volunteer activities with children and youth outside the church. The experience of other churches adopting similar policies is positive. Unfortunately, most churches have not been motivated to take this action until after a problem has occurred. We, at Mosaic, are motivated because we are entrusted with the spiritual, educational and moral development of our children and youth.

The following policies shall be followed by all professional and lay people in their work for Mosaic United Methodist Church.

### **A. Screening of Lay and Professional Workers ("Leaders")**

Lay and professional child and youth activity leaders must go through a standardized screening procedure overseen by a council consisting of the pastor, youth director and/or children's director, and others as designated by the pastor, who reserves the right to verify information regarding background and history of activities with minors, as well as submitting to a criminal background check including finger prints. An application to volunteer must be submitted and references will be checked. See Appendix C

These requirements are for all people working in youth activities. No one will be accepted who has had a criminal sexual or physical abuse violation. Leaders shall be informed of the rules they are required to follow in their activities with minors and shall be required to sign that they will faithfully follow these requirements. See Appendix B

### **B. History of Sexual Misconduct**

Any adult who has been convicted of sexual misconduct or abuse may not participate in any capacity in Mosaic United Methodist Church programs for children or youth.

### **C. Dating**

Adult leaders shall not date or be romantically involved with a Mosaic youth. If there is a current relationship, the adult cannot participate in Mosaic events with that minor.

#### **D. Two-deep Leadership**

Two adult leaders must be present at each activity with minors. Exceptions are youth activities held in rooms with a window and a door. Such activities are to be monitored by the paid staff. The Nursery shall always have at least two leaders.

#### **E. Individual Consultation**

Individual consultation between adults and minors must be done within the two-deep framework. In situations that require personal conferences, mentoring, or counseling, this should be conducted in the church offices with at least one other approved leader present in the area (though not necessarily in the office).

As a rule, the counseling should be as public as possible, without sacrificing effectiveness. Seclusion should be avoided. If conducted in an office, it shall only be in an office with an unobstructed window in the door or wall. Unplanned individual contact on outings (such as for counseling purposes) must be done in view of another adult or minor. Planned individual contact outside the church building must occur only in public places and with the prior consent of the minor and parent or guardian. Examples would be a ride home or a conversation over a Coke between a disciple and mentor. Individuals participating in the mentoring program are allowed to meet with youth on an individual basis but must inform the parents of all activities and must have a signed release from the parent or guardian of the youth on file.

#### **F. Respect of Privacy**

Adult leaders need to respect the privacy of minors in situations such as use of rest rooms, changing into swimming suits, or taking showers on overnight outings, and intrude only insofar as health and safety require. They also need to protect their own privacy in similar situations.

#### **G. Separate accommodations**

A minimum of two adults should be present at an overnight activity. If participants are both male and female, the adults should be both male and female. If these conditions can not be met, the event should be canceled. When camping, no minor is permitted to sleep in the tent of an adult other than his or her own parent or guardian. On other outings that require that an adult share the same room as a minor the minors and parents or guardians shall give prior consent. The adult should avoid occupying the same bed as a minor, again with the exception of a parent or guardian. Males and females should sleep in separate rooms at events and have separate access to bathroom facilities. When separate facilities are not available, times for male and female use should be scheduled and posted for showers.

#### **H. Appropriate Attire**

Proper clothing for activities is required, e.g., skinny-dipping is not appropriate as part of church activities.

#### **I. Housing**

When private homes are used for overnight events, the program staff member will make final approval of all adults involved as hosts, hostesses and chaperones. At

no time may only one child or youth stay in a private home for a church related event.

**J. No Secret Activities**

There are no "secret" activities or organizations recognized by Mosaic. All aspects of the church program are open to observation by parents and congregational leaders. Confidentiality or secrecy is not a privilege of adult leaders while involved in church activities with youth, but a privilege of the youth.

**K. Transportation**

Transportation to and from events is the responsibility of the families. During events, drivers should avoid dropping off or picking up minors without being accompanied by another adult. Mosaic shall set standards for who is permitted to drive during events. Any deviations should have the prior consent of the parent and be reported to the next person in the line of responsibility. See Appendix D

**L. Constructive Discipline**

Discipline used in church activities should be constructive and reflect Christian values. Corporal punishment is never permitted.

**M. Hazing Prohibited**

Physical hazing and initiations are prohibited and may not be included as part of any Mosaic activity.

**N. Sexual Behaviors**

No sexual behavior is permitted with Mosaic United Methodist minors. Other behaviors which are abusive, but do not involve physical contact, are also prohibited. Examples are sexual comments, the showing of sexual material and the exposure of sexual parts of the minor's body and/or the adult's body. Hugging at church events should be a brief expression of Christian love given only in group settings. Kissing at church events is an inappropriate expression of Christian love between non-related persons.

**O. Gifts**

Child and youth leaders shall not give personal gifts or money to individual children or youth without first notifying the parents and direct supervisor. Gifts to entire classes are acceptable.

**P. Nursery**

The nursery (if so established) shall have an identification system that links the child with the parent in a way that prevents the possibility of someone else taking the child. The nursery is required to have two adult leaders at all times of operation.

**Q. Reporting of Violations of These Rules**

Reporting should be made to both the task force leader and the pastor. The pastor will always have first-hand reporting of any incident. In the event that an incident of abuse must be reported to an outside agency, the pastor should have full

knowledge of such reporting. The suspicions of child abuse occurring during an event shall be reported to the event coordinator and to the local authorities. The alleged perpetrator should be removed and supervised until the proper authorities arrive on the scene. Individual's suspecting abuse must also fill out a "Report of Suspected Incident of Abuse" form. See Appendix F

## **R. Mandatory reporting of abuse**

According to Georgia State Law, Section 19-7-5, those having cause to suspect that a minor, seen in the course of professional responsibility (including church professionals) has or will be the victim of abuse or neglect, must report the case as soon as possible by telephone or personal visit to the local county child welfare agency, the office of the county sheriff or the city police department.

According to, The Office of Congressional and Government Affairs (**OCGA**)

O.C.G.A. 19-7-5(C)(1):

**The following persons who have reasonable cause to believe that a child has been abused must report that abuse:**

- Physicians licensed to practice medicine, interns or residents.
- Hospital or medical personnel
- Dentists
- Licensed psychologists and persons participating in internships to obtain licensing
- Podiatrists
- Registered professional nurses or licensed practical nurses
- Professional counselors, social workers, or marriage and family therapists licensed pursuant to Chapter 10A of title 43
- School teachers\*
- School administrators
- School guidance counselors, visiting teachers, school social workers, or school psychologists
- Child welfare agency personnel
- Child service organization personnel

- Law enforcement personnel

\*Includes Day Care Providers

**Protection as a Mandated Reporter - Georgia Code 19-7-5(f),(g):** Any person or persons, partnership, firm corporation association, hospital, or other entity participating in the making of a report to a child welfare agency providing protective services or to an appropriate law enforcement authority will be immune from any civil or criminal liability provided such a report is made in good faith.

Suspected child abuse which is required to be reported by any person by law must be reported notwithstanding that the reasonable cause to believe such abuse had occurred or is occurring is based in whole or in part upon any communication to that person which is otherwise made privileged or confidential by law.

**Responsibilities of Mandated Reporters - O.C.G.A. 19-7-5.(c)(2)(D),(E):**

If a person is required to report abuse because that person attends to a child, as a member of the staff of a Hospital, School, Social Agency, or similar facility, that person must notify the person in charge of the facility or the designated delegate who then must report the abuse. A staff member who makes a report to the person designated is deemed to have fully complied with the law. Any other person who has reasonable cause to believe that a child is abused may report.

An oral report must be made as soon as possible by telephone to DFCS Protective Services which is designated by the Department of Human Resources or to an appropriate law enforcement authority or District Attorney. If a report of child abuse is made by DFCS or independently discovered by DFCS, then DFCS must immediately notify the appropriate law enforcement authority or District Attorney.

**Liability for failure to report - O.C.G.A. 19-7-5:**

Any person or official required by law to report by law to report a suspected case of child abuse who knowingly and willfully fails to do so will be guilty of a misdemeanor.

Not reporting is a dangerous game because human behavior is unpredictable. If you don't report thinking "the parents have dealt with it and it won't happen again," if something does happen, there is the liability issue as well as the personal responsibility of thinking it might have been prevented if it had been reported. If ever in doubt, call and let DFCS direct you.

Concern for the alleged victim, good judgment and open communication are the standards surrounding the reporting of an alleged case of emotional, physical, or sexual abuse. Keep calm, stay with the participant and know that you don't have to deal with the victim or information alone. Any person who reports an incident in good faith is immune from either civil or criminal liability. All reports are treated with confidentiality by the authorities.

There are four types of child abuse.

1. Physical abuse is the deliberate physical injuring of a child by an adult.
2. Sexual abuse is the involvement of a child in any sexual act or situation for the gratification or benefit of an adult.
3. Emotional abuse is maltreatment which causes low self-esteem in a child or undue fear or anxiety, or other damage to a child's well-being caused by such acts as angry fault finding, humiliating and belittling a child for mistakes or failures, and deliberate inattention to a child's emotional needs.
4. Neglect is not providing necessary food, clothing, and shelter, health care, psychological nurturing, education or supervision for a child.

Variance from these guidelines can only be permitted when written consent is given by the Mosaic United Methodist Church Pastor and Council (consisting of the pastor, youth director and/or children's director, and others as designated by the pastor, consisting of at least 4 people) for deviation from a specific guideline for identified reasons.

Program staff is responsible for screening and registering people working in their program area, informing them of these guidelines and are responsible for these policies being followed in their area. Adult leaders are liable for disciplinary action for not following these guidelines, even if no abuse can be established.

These policies shall go into effect immediately. All new adult participants in Mosaic United Methodist Church activities involving minors shall go through the application and screening process. All participating adults should sign a form acknowledging they have read and understand these policies for reducing the risk of injury to minors.