



**Statement of Purpose and Procedure  
for Safeguarding the Well Being of Children and Youth**

The members and staff of Highland Park United Methodist Church (hereafter referred to as HPUMC) believe that we are called by God to create a sanctuary for all the children and youth in the care of our ministry by protecting those who are powerless and empowering them through faith and trust.

Therefore, the members and staff of HPUMC are committed to the safety, welfare and protection of all children and youth participating in the activities and programs of this church. This policy addresses the preventable risk of any form of abuse, whether physical, mental or sexual, by any of the staff, teachers or volunteers of this church while on church property or while engaged in church activities or programs. It is also the policy of HPUMC to protect, to the extent practicable, the rights of its staff, job applicants and unpaid volunteers from unfounded allegations of abuse.

Any confidential information concerning staff, job applicants and volunteers obtained pursuant to this policy shall be marked confidential, kept in a central location under the control of the Child Protection Policy (CPP) Administrator, and disclosed only to staff and lay officers of HPUMC having a "need to know" such information.

All HPUMC activities and programs, regardless of location, involving children and/or youth age 18 or younger, will be subject to the following policy.

- As often as practicable, two (2) adults will be assigned to supervise or lead all activities involving children or youth age 18 years or younger.
- Each person/applicant – paid or unpaid – applying to/working at HPUMC as an employee, contract worker, teacher or volunteer for child or youth activities, as well as other designated workers, will be required to complete a background information form and undergo a criminal history/ background check.
- HPUMC will not tolerate or accept any act or omission as specifically described in Attachment A (Prohibited Acts).
- Upon accusation, the accused is entitled to prompt and fair disposition of such serious charges and to receive due process of law including the presumption of innocence unless proven guilty.
- Any violation of the policy shall be reported in accordance with Section B of this document.

**Child Protection Policy Guidelines  
For Staff and Volunteers**

**A. Solicitation/Registration of Volunteers and Staff**

Staff, teachers of children and youth under 18 years of age, volunteers for child and youth activities or programs of HPUMC, and other designated volunteers will be required to complete a background information form providing personal and confidential information necessary to perform security background checks on each individual. All personal information voluntarily disclosed, the results of all security background checks, or the refusal of any person to participate in a program or activity as a result of such disclosure requirements will be considered confidential.

Security background checks for persons age 18 and older will be administered by or under the direction of the CPP Administrator with the assistance of the appropriate agency performing the checks. Without the written permission of a staff member or volunteer (except as may be required by law), the information contained in the background information form and the results of the background check will be kept confidential.

The CPP Administrator will maintain a locked storage cabinet in the church for all background information forms and the results of all background checks. The results of the security background checks will be destroyed periodically if required by the guidelines mandated by the appropriate local agency.

Whether disclosed voluntarily or by result of the security background check, the following items will automatically disqualify an applicant from participating in an activity involving children under 18 years of age: Any indictment alleging the offense of or any conviction for: murder; aggravated assault; sexual abuse; sexual assault (rape); aggravated sexual assault; injury to a child; incest; indecency with a child; inducing sexual contact or sexual performance of a child; possession or promotion of child pornography; the sale, distribution, or display of harmful material to a minor; employment harmful to children; or abandonment or endangerment of a child.

All other convictions or charges for any crimes not listed above will be reviewed by the CPP Administrator.

If the applicant disputes information that appears in his or her criminal history transcript, he or she may appeal through the agency performing the background checks.

A staff member or volunteer may be accepted while their background check is in process provided a registered staff member or registered volunteer approves and accepts responsibility for him/her.

All staff members, volunteers involved in activities with children under 18 years of age and other designated volunteers shall file a background information form every 1-2 years disclosing any changes in applicant/residence information and criminal history, and certifying that he/she has read and understands HPUMC's policy and guidelines on Child Protection, has not violated the same, and agrees to abide by the same in the future.

## **B. Reporting Violation of Policy**

In order to maintain an environment free of destructive acts toward all children and youth under the care and ministry of HPUMC, *the staff, teachers, parents and volunteers of HPUMC must be aware of their individual responsibility to report any questionable circumstance, observation, act, omission, or situation thought to be in violation of this Policy. Reports should be made as follows:*

1. **LEVEL 1: For life threatening or emergency situations, including threats of imminent danger**, call 911 or local police immediately and as soon as possible afterward, make a report to the HPUMC staff member in charge of the area or event and Child Protective Services (CPS):

- Highland Park Police: (214) 521-5000
- CPS Child Abuse Hotline: 1 (800) 252-5400 or <https://www.txabusehotline.org>.

2. **LEVEL 2: Other Situations Requiring Reporting**

For situations described below, contact the HPUMC staff member in charge of the applicable area or event as soon as possible, as well as the CPP Administrator, Executive Pastor, Director of Finance and Administration, or other appropriate or available program staff. The Response Team (Section E, below) will promptly investigate and determine further action. If it is determined that further reporting is required, the person who witnessed or received the report of abuse or suspected abuse, together with the HPUMC staff member to whom they reported it, should then report it to the CPS Child Abuse Hotline at the number or URL shown above within 48 hours of first learning of/suspecting the abuse. Reports may be made anonymously. An Incident Report (Attachment B) must also be completed as described in the Documentation section of this Policy.

- **If you suspect abusive or neglectful behavior**
- **If you witness suspicious behavior**
- **If a child or youth reports abusive or neglectful conduct** while engaged in a church sponsored activity involving staff, teachers, or volunteers of HPUMC, or parents/other family or friends, regardless of where the conduct occurred (HPUMC, the child's home or other location)
- **If you are not sure if a reported or suspected abusive/neglectful situation should be reported**, you should still follow the procedure above.

**Procedures for handling abuse situations/incidents** witnessed by or reported to you are listed below. These guidelines should be followed to insure the security of the child or youth involved and to protect against physical, emotional or psychological injury, to all persons involved.

- Personally secure the safety of the child, children, or youth.
- Report the incident immediately as directed above.
- Do not leave the child, children or youth alone to report the incident.
- Do not personally confront the alleged or accused violator of the Policy.
- Allow the designated person (program staff, Executive Pastor or CPP Administrator) to provide you with instructions for reporting the incident.
- HPUMC will designate a representative who will be solely responsible for all communications on behalf of the church. All inquiries must be directed to this person.

### **C. Documentation**

In all cases, an Incident Report must be completed by the witness/reporter together with the applicable HPUMC staff member, and submitted to the CPP Administrator as soon as possible. This applies to all incidents, including anonymously reported cases. Incident Reports will be maintained confidentially in a locked file cabinet.

The report should include specific words first spoken by the child or youth and the conduct and demeanor observed concerning the incident.

### **D. Consequences of Violation**

Any person accused of a Prohibited Act (Attachment A, p. 5), whether a staff member or volunteer, will immediately be suspended from participation in all child and youth activities and programs of HPUMC. Such suspension shall continue during any investigation by the church, appropriate law enforcement agency or TDFPS.

Any person found to have committed a Prohibited Act shall be prohibited from future participation in all child and youth activities and programs of HPUMC. If the person is a staff member, such conduct may also result in termination of employment.

Failure to timely report a Prohibited Act to the designated person shall be considered a procedural violation of this Policy and shall be grounds for termination of employment of a staff member and suspension and dismissal from participation in all child and youth activities and programs of HPUMC. Such person can also be held liable for a Class A misdemeanor.

### **E. Response**

Upon suspecting an abuse or upon learning of an alleged abuse, HPUMC's Response Team will immediately initiate the following institutional response.

- Remove and suspend the accused from responsibilities involving children/youth pending investigation.
- Inform the parents or guardian of the alleged victim and respond to their questions and concerns.
- Notify appropriate governmental authorities.
- Notify the director of the affected ministry area, the church's insurance carriers and legal counsel.

Although the Response Team should attempt to take these actions in the order indicated, there should be no delay in completing all of the steps as soon as possible after receiving a report.

The Response Team will be composed of the CPP Administrator, the Director of Finance and Administration, the Senior Pastor, the Executive Pastor, the Church Council Chair and the Pastor/Parish Relations Chair. All members of the Response Team shall be fair and impartial. Any member of the Response Team who has, or might have the appearance of, a special interest in the outcome of the complaint will abstain from involvement regarding the incident in question at the request of the Church Council Chair. If the Church Council Chair has an actual or apparent conflict of interest, the Senior Pastor shall request his or her abstention.

The Response Team's plan of action will include:

- Discussion with legal counsel and insurance carriers(s) and assisting with any investigation.
- Cooperation with governmental authorities in any investigation.
- Providing any appropriate assistance to the alleged victim and his/her family including obtaining counseling or referral to a mental health professional.
- Designating a spokesperson for HPUMC to respond to any media or other public inquiries
- Responding appropriately to the needs of the accused.
- Reminding staff and volunteers of the need for confidentiality at all times.
- Considering and responding appropriately to the concerns of other parents.

The rights of all parties shall be respected; confidentiality, consistent with legal requirements, shall be carefully maintained.

**This policy is adopted in concurrence with the policies regarding Reducing the Risk of the North Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church, September 1, 2002, updated March 2012.**

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## **A Summary of Your Rights under the Fair Credit Reporting Act Relating to Criminal Background Screening**

The federal Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA) promotes the accuracy, fairness, and privacy of information in the files of consumer reporting agencies. There are many types of consumer reporting agencies, including credit bureaus and specialty agencies (such as agencies that sell information about check writing histories, medical records, and rental history records). Here is a summary of your major rights under the FCRA. For more information, including information about additional rights, go to [www.ftc.gov/credit](http://www.ftc.gov/credit) or write to: Consumer Response Center, Room 130-A, Federal Trade Commission, 600 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W., Washington, DC 20580.

- **You must be told if information in your file has been used against you.** Anyone who uses a credit report or another type of consumer report to deny your application for credit, insurance, or employment – or to take another adverse action against you – must tell you, and must give you the name, address, and phone number of the agency that provided the information.
- **You have the right to know what is in your file.** You may request and obtain all the information about you in the files of a consumer reporting agency (your “file disclosure”). You will be required to provide proper identification, which may include your Social Security number. In many cases, the disclosure will be free. You are entitled to a free file disclosure if:
  - A person has taken adverse action against you because of information in your credit report;
  - You are the victim of identity theft and place a fraud alert in your file;
  - Your file contains inaccurate information as a result of fraud;
  - You are on public assistance;
  - You are unemployed but expect to apply for employment within 60 days.

In addition, by September 2005 all consumers will be entitled to one free disclosure every 12 months upon request from each nationwide credit bureau and from nationwide specialty consumer reporting agencies. See [www.ftc.gov/credit](http://www.ftc.gov/credit) for additional information.

- **You have the right to ask for a credit score.** Credit scores are numerical summaries of your credit-worthiness based on information from credit bureaus. You may request a credit score from consumer reporting agencies that create scores or distribute scores used in residential real property loans, but you will have to pay for it. In some mortgage transactions, you will receive credit score information for free from the mortgage lender.
- **You have the right to dispute incomplete or inaccurate information.** If you identify information in your file that is incomplete or inaccurate, and report it to the consumer reporting agency, the agency must investigate unless your dispute is frivolous. See [www.ftc.gov/credit](http://www.ftc.gov/credit) for an explanation of dispute procedures.
- **Consumer reporting agencies must correct or delete inaccurate, incomplete, or unverifiable information.** Inaccurate, incomplete or unverifiable information must be removed or corrected, usually within 30 days. However, a consumer reporting agency may continue to report information it has verified as accurate.
- **Consumer reporting agencies may not report outdated negative information.** In most cases, a consumer reporting agency may not report negative information that is more than seven years old, or bankruptcies that are more than 10 years old.
- **Access to your file is limited.** A consumer reporting agency may provide information about you only to people with a valid need – usually to consider an application with a creditor, insurer, employer, landlord, or other business. The FCRA specifies those with a valid need for access.
- **You must give your consent for reports to be provided to employers.** A consumer reporting agency may not give out information about you to your employer, or a potential employer, without your written consent given to the employer. Written consent generally is not required in the trucking industry. For more information, go to [www.ftc.gov/credit](http://www.ftc.gov/credit).
- **You may limit “prescreened” offers of credit and insurance you get based on information in your credit report.** Unsolicited “prescreened” offers for credit and insurance must include a toll-free phone number you can call if you choose to remove your name and address from the lists these offers are based on. You may opt-out with the nationwide credit bureaus at 1-888-5-OPTOUT (1-888-567-8688).
- **You may seek damages from violators.** If a consumer reporting agency, or in some cases, a user of consumer reports or a furnisher of information to a consumer reporting agency violates the FCRA, you may be able to sue in state or federal court.
- **Identity theft victims and active duty military personnel have additional rights.** For more information, visit [www.ftc.gov/credit](http://www.ftc.gov/credit).

**States may enforce the FCRA, and many states have their own consumer reporting laws. In some cases, you may have more rights under state law. For more information, contact your state or local consumer protection agency or your state Attorney General.**

## Child Protection Policy

### Prohibited Acts

The following acts are prohibited by this Policy and will not be tolerated or accepted during any HPUMC activity or program. Any observations or personal knowledge of such violations must be immediately reported to the Executive Pastor, the CPP Administrator, or the appropriate program staff **after** the safety of the child, children, or youth involved has been assured.

- Any display or demonstration of sexual activity, abuse, insinuation of abuse, or evidence of abusive conduct towards a child or youth.
- Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between any adult and a child or youth.
- Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between a youth and a child.
- Physically abusive behavior or bodily injury to a child or youth.
- Physical neglect of a child, children or youth, including failure to provide adequate supervision in relation to the activities of HPUMC.
- Causing mental or emotional injury to a child, children or youth.
- Possessing obscene or pornographic materials at any function of HPUMC with the exception of approved sex education materials.
- Possessing or being under the influence of any illegal drugs.
- Consuming or being under the influence of alcohol while leading or participating in a child or youth function at HPUMC.



HIGHLAND PARK  
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

**Incident Report**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

Child's name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of birth: \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's name(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Home phone: (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ Work/Cell phone: (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

Date, location, and time problem was identified:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Description of the problem: (continue on reverse if needed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Evidence: Physical \_\_\_\_\_

Behavioral \_\_\_\_\_

Verbal \_\_\_\_\_

HPUMC staff notified – names, dates and times:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name \_\_\_\_\_