

Munsey Memorial UMC Safe Sanctuaries Policy

Reviewed August 2026

Purpose:

Among the precious gifts given us by a loving God are our children and youth. Munsey Memorial United Methodist Church is blessed with the abundant presence of children, youth, and their families. As we strive to provide a safe place to worship, teach, and minister to our youth and children, Munsey Church covenants to abide by the following procedures and educational guidelines.

Definitions:

Adult - a person eighteen years of age or older and out of high school

Youth - a person in grades 6 through 12

Child - a person in grade 5 or younger

Qualified adult - a non-staff or clergy person who has completed Safe Sanctuaries training, signed the Safe Sanctuaries covenant, and agreed to a background check

Procedures to Reduce the Risk of Harm:

1. At all times, Munsey will try to ensure that no fewer than two adults will be present in a gathering of one or more children or youth during any church-sponsored program, event, or ministry activity involving youth or children. However, if only one adult (or two adults who are related, cohabitating, or in a serious ongoing relationship or other close relationship as defined by the church) is present at any time at a children's or youth ministry activity, event, or program, an adult floater should be present when available and will move unannounced in and out of all rooms where only one adult is present. If a floater is involved, the doors to all the rooms involved should remain open. While it is preferable to have two adults present, it is acceptable in a public setting for one adult to meet one or more youth, e.g., at Chick-fil-A, Starbucks, etc., where other people are present, the adult and youth are visible, and isolation is avoided. Adults should not put themselves in a position to be one-on-one with youth in a private setting or a place without the guarantee of others being present at all times.
2. For transport situations, it is preferable for two adults to be present in a vehicle. In the instance where this is not possible, one adult is sufficient so long as the vehicle travels with other vehicles designated for that function or where multiple children/youth are present in the vehicle with the adult. This procedure does not apply to vehicles occupied by immediate family only. Parents may give permission for an adult to transport their child one-on-one as needed.
3. Qualified adults and staff persons working in ministry with children and youth must be at least two years older than any youth or child with whom they are working.
4. Paid staff working with children must be sixteen years of age or older. Paid staff working with youth must be eighteen years of age. Qualified adults under the age of eighteen or less than two years older than the oldest student can assist in children's ministry but should not have primary responsibility in a given situation.
5. Background checks are mandatory for all paid Munsey staff and qualified adults working with children or youth. Refusal to allow a background check will result in the qualified adult being directed to serve in another area. Background checks will be repeated periodically for qualified adults who continue to serve at Munsey.
6. To become a qualified adult, applicants will complete a covenant and disclosure form with appropriate references as requested. For an applicant with our year-round ministries who

has not been regularly attending church for at least six months, the applicant must provide the names and contact information of two non-related people to serve as references of his/her character and gifts for ministry with children/youth. Our short-term seasonal ministries (example – Vacation Bible School) are exempt from this, though the online background checks are still required. The church may utilize all available resources to verify information given by a volunteer applicant.

7. An uncovered window should be present in at least one interior door or the interior wall in rooms in the church facility where children or youth activities or events take place. In the event that an uncovered window is not in the door and there is only one adult present, the door should remain open.
8. When a child or youth seeks pastoral counseling, the adult asked to provide pastoral counseling should determine his/her qualifications to address the child's/youth's needs effectively and, if needed, refer the child/youth to another adult more qualified.
9. Pastoral counseling sessions, undertaken by Munsey clergy, staff, or qualified adults with youth or children, will take place in a room with the door open throughout the entire session. If two or more unrelated adults are present, the door can be closed.
10. Any youth or children's program, ministry event, or activity will have advance notice to parents and guardians.
11. Corporal punishment will never be used as a means of discipline of children or youth. This includes hitting, pinching, and any other forms of physical discipline. This also applies to treatment of one's own children while engaged in a church function.
12. There will be no sexual or inappropriate physical contact with children or youth.
13. There will be no verbal or psychological abuse of children or youth. There will be no use of sexual language in jokes.
14. There will be no sexual harassment.
15. Reasonable suspicion of abuse of youth or children will be promptly reported in compliance with the church's reporting procedures and applicable law.
16. On overnight youth trips, adults shall not room with youth in hotel settings, unless there are two adults in the room. They should never sleep in the same bed with a youth, unless it is their own child. On sleepovers and lock-ins, attention should be given to placement of adults so that they are never sleeping alone with a group of children or youth.

What is child abuse and neglect?

Current Tennessee Definitions of Abuse from the Tennessee Department of Children's Services
<https://files.dcs.tn.gov/policies/chap14/WA1.pdf>.

Procedures for Responding to Allegations of Abuse:

1. **Assure the child/youth's safety.**
 Take steps necessary to assure the safety of the child/youth if the situation is one of imminent harm or life-threatening.
2. **Do not confront the accused abuser with anger or hostility.**
 Treat the accused with dignity but immediately remove him/her from further involvement with children/youth.
3. **Immediately report to TN Dept. of Child Services or local law enforcement.**
 When you have *reasonable cause to suspect an incident of child or youth physical or sexual abuse, neglect, or exploitation*, Tennessee law requires all persons to make a report within 24 hours. Failure to report child abuse or neglect is a violation of the law. According to the TN Dept. of Children's Services (DCS), a child or youth's statement of

abuse is sufficient cause to make a report. Do not investigate the incident yourself – the TN DCS has advised that your well-intentioned “investigation” may interfere with their investigation. Rather, immediately report to the DCS or appropriate law enforcement agency.

- a. Where the victim is under age 18, the person observing or receiving disclosure of the abuse should report immediately by calling the Tennessee DCS’s Child Abuse Hotline at 877-237-0004. All information received by this central intake is confidential. You do not have to disclose your identity if you do not want to. The reporter is free from civil or criminal liability for reports of suspected child abuse or neglect made in good faith. Central intake will then contact the local child protective service agency to determine whether further investigation is needed. You do not need to call the local child protective service agency.
- b. Where the youth is age 18 or older, he/she should be encouraged to make a report.

4. Then, immediately report to church staff.

- a. For a suspected incident of child abuse, qualified adults should immediately report to the staff person assigned to the corresponding ministry area. If the suspected incident involves a staff person, it should be reported to the Senior Pastor.
 - i. They will then report to the Senior Pastor, who will report directly to the District Superintendent or the Bishop’s office. If the Senior Pastor is the accused, the qualified or supervising staff will report directly to the District Superintendent or the Bishop’s office. Contact information can be found at www.holston.org/appalachian-district or www.holston.org.
 - ii. If the staff member in the corresponding ministry area is not immediately available or is the person accused of the abuse, report should be made directly to the Senior Pastor, who then will report directly to the District Superintendent or the Bishop’s office.

Any subsequent reporting/notification by church staff should honor the confidentiality of the original reporter, providing only information necessary about the original reporter to supervising staff, unless the consent of the original reporter is obtained.

5. Church staff will determine whether to advise the parent(s)/guardian(s).

The staff member in the corresponding ministry area, in consultation with the Senior Pastor, will determine the appropriateness of notifying parent(s)/ guardian(s) following these guidelines:

- a. Where no parent or guardian is the accused, the pastoral staff, in conjunction with the staff member in the corresponding ministry area, will advise the parent(s)/guardian(s). If the child/youth is present, any necessary steps should be taken to assure the child/youth’s safety until parent(s)/guardian(s) arrive.
- b. Where one or more parents/guardians may be involved or accused, do not immediately advise the parents, as per the recommendations of the Tennessee Department of Children’s Services. To do so may interfere with the pending investigation. After the investigation has begun by DCS, the parents/guardians may be contacted especially with respect to pastoral care.

6. The Senior Pastor will promptly report to the District Superintendent or the Bishop’s office if any allegation involves church staff or qualified adults or a church function or occurred on church property.

7. **The Senior Pastor, along with the staff members involved in the ministry area, will determine a faithful response to the accused abuser.**
8. **The Senior Pastor, in consultation with Staff Parish, will determine the need for a statement made to the congregation** if any allegations involve church staff or qualified adults or a church function or occurred on church property.
9. **The Senior Pastor or his/her designee will promptly notify the church's attorney and church's insurance agent** if any allegation involves church staff or qualified adults or a church function or occurred on church property.
10. **The Senior Pastor or his/her designee will be responsible for any necessary communication with the media.** None but the designated spokesperson is authorized to speak to the media on behalf of the congregation.
11. **Outside of these outlined reporting procedures, situations should not be discussed with others to reduce risk of harm for all involved.**

Conclusion:

In all of our ministries with children and youth, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child and youth will be protected, "surrounded by steadfast love, established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal" (*United Methodist Hymnal*, p. 44).