

## **POLICY FOR REPORTING SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE**

Oklahoma Conference, United Methodist Church

### **Reporting Suspected Child Abuse**

According to Oklahoma law, every person who has reason to believe that a child under the age of 18 has been abused is mandated to report the suspected abuse. Volunteer leaders and workers are no exception.

At any Conference or district event, if a worker/leader suspects the abuse of a child/youth, whether it may have occurred at the event or prior to the event, that worker/leader should discuss his/her suspicions with the head of the event and together ascertain the details needed to make an accurate report. Information should include the following:

- Name, age and gender of the child/youth and other family members
- Address, phone number and/or directions to the child's home
- Parents' places of employment
- Description of the suspected abuse
- Current condition of the child/youth

Acquire a reporting form from the dean/head of the event, the camp director/manager, or the Conference Ministry Center. The person making the report should keep a copy of the report and consider it confidential information.

The leader/supervisor should then contact the Oklahoma Department of Human Services Abuse Hotline in the presence of the head of the event. That number is:

**1-800-522-3511**

The site official and the appropriate Conference level director(s) (e.g. Director of Camps and Conferences, Director of Safe Sanctuaries, etc.) should be promptly informed when the report is made. The Conference Office number is 405-530-2000 or 1-800-231-4166. DHS is, however, the only one to receive a detailed report. Contact of the child/youth's parents and/or pastor should be discerned on a case by case basis.

### **Making a Determination of Child Abuse**

Whether a child gives an indication of abuse through behaviors, physical condition or verbal communication, the leader/supervisor should be sensitive to the conflict and trauma the child has experienced.

- Do not panic or overreact to what the child/youth discloses
- Do not criticize the child/youth or claim that the child/youth misunderstood what happened
- Do not promise not to tell anyone, but respect the child/youth's privacy. Assure the child/youth that you will keep the disclosure in limited confidentiality discussing it only with adults in charge who need to be involved in the reporting process. Follow through on this assurance for the protection of the child/youth's dignity.

Avoid interviewing the child/youth repeatedly but encourage him/her to be willing to share with other adults who will act to provide help.

The event head and the worker/leader should refer to materials on indications of psychological maltreatment, neglect, physical and sexual abuse to guide their discernment of possible abuse if there are questions.



### **Suspected Abuse Involving Event Staff**

Any suspicions of abuse by event leaders/supervisors should immediately be brought to the attention of the head of the event. When suspicions are determined to be well founded and report information as described above has been collected, the Oklahoma Department of Human Services Child Abuse Hotline should be called. That number is:

**1-800-522-3511**

When such a report is made, the appropriate Conference level director(s) should be promptly informed of the report but not the details of the incident. The Conference Office number is 405-530-2000 or 1-800-231-4166. If the suspected abuser is a minor, his/her parents/custodians/guardians should also be informed. The need for confidentiality is always a high priority.

The suspected abuser shall immediately be removed from situations where direct, private contact with the children/youth could occur. Appropriate measures should be taken by the leadership of the event to preserve a sense of security and normality. This could mean that the suspected abuser is requested to leave.

### **Other Considerations**

Inappropriate sexual advances should not be confused with physical contacts that are appropriate expressions of affection and concern. All workers/leaders should take the following precautions to prevent confusing situations:

- Have other staff members present anytime children/youth are dressing, undressing, bathing, etc.
- Respect the child/youth's privacy and do not become more intrusive or curious than necessary monitoring health or welfare.
- Respect the child/youth's wishes in terms of limiting means of the expression of affection and concern.
- Protect your own privacy and do not discuss personally sensitive or intimate matters with children or youth.
- Do not pursue personal, private relationships with children/youth following an event.

These guidelines were developed from *For Kid's Sake: A Child Abuse Prevention and Reporting Kit*, Oklahoma State Department of Health, *and For Camp Counselors: Guidelines on Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation*, National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

