

# How to Begin Developing and Updating a Safe Sanctuaries® Policy

*The process of developing a Safe Sanctuaries® Policy in your congregation is not complicated. These 10 steps will guide you in reducing the risk of abuse and protecting children and youth in your congregation.*

**Step 1 – Find out** if your congregation has Safe Sanctuaries® Policies and Guidelines in place, when it was last updated, and when leaders, teachers, and staff last attended training. If a policy does not exist, make every effort to implement the following steps as swiftly as possible.

**Step 2 – Talk with** the senior pastor, congregational leaders, teachers, parents, guardians, grandparents, and others who are concerned about the importance of keeping children and youth safe. As a group, discuss the existing policy or the process for creating Safe Sanctuaries® Policies and Guidelines. Meet as a group with the Church Council. Resources in Steps 3-6 will be helpful in this process.

**Step 3 – Contact** your [Annual Conference Safe Sanctuaries® Coordinator](#) or the [Discipleship Ministries staff](#) to obtain a copy of the policy and training adopted by your Annual Conference. If you are unsure of your church's Annual Conference, use the [UMC Annual Conference Finder](#) or ask your senior pastor.

**Step 4 – Use** the [Discipleship Ministries Self-Evaluation Tool](#) to assess your congregation's policy and guidelines needs for the prevention of abuse in your congregation's ministry with children and youth. This tool helps identify the areas that require attention.

**Step 5 – Gather** current resources necessary for planning and maintaining policies that protect children, youth, and the adults who serve them. Keep these in a place for church leaders and teachers to easily reference. [Safe Sanctuaries®: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth](#) and [Safe Sanctuaries® for Children and Youth DVD: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church](#) were developed through Discipleship Ministries of The United Methodist Church. The book includes: Information on recruiting, screening, and hiring workers with children and youth, Guidelines for developing policies and procedures, Training models, Suggestions for congregational response to allegations of abuse, Sample forms and guides. Also view the recorded webinar [Safe Sanctuaries - The Basics](#).

**Step 6 – Recommend** that your pastoral staff read [Safe Sanctuaries® for Ministers: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church](#) to gain a better understanding of the ministerial role in keeping children and youth safe in church and at church activities. This resource is written specifically for those serving as pastors in local church settings.

**Step 7 – Write or update** Safe Sanctuaries® Policies and Guidelines for your congregation, making sure to address the unique risks in your congregational setting. Your Annual Conference is vital to developing these policies. Acquaint everyone in the congregation with the policy and guidelines, and its contents. [View sample policies and guidelines](#) for congregations of all sizes.

**Step 8 – Know**

your legal responsibility. In many states, clergy members and those involved in the care of children and youth are considered "mandated reporters," meaning they have specific obligation to report suspected child abuse. Updated information on these mandates in your particular state can be found at [Child Welfare Information Gateway](#).

**Step 9 - Contact** your local hospital, police department, social service agency or public health department for names of people in your area qualified to speak with teachers, leaders, parents, and church staff on local resources and procedures for responding to potential abuse.

**Step 10 – In all you do, remember that as part of his public ministry, Jesus committed the then-radical act of welcoming children. Our commitment to reducing the risk of abuse in the church for children and youth is one way that we live out Jesus’ act of love.**

<http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/getting-started-safesanctuaries>



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