

Child Protection Policy

1. Goals of this Policy.

In the Church, children should enjoy a safe, just, and healthy environment in which to grow in Christ and develop healthy Christian friendships. This is the express teaching of Scripture (2 Samuel 13:1-21, Ezekiel 16:20-21) and also of “the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word” (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1.6). Such care for children promotes the honor of Christ, whose kingdom is established in justice and righteousness (Romans 14:17), and who shows special care for children (Luke 18:15-17).

We therefore adopt this policy in order to:

- a. Protect children by identifying abusive behaviors that should be prevented, and safe behaviors that should be promoted. This is part of our duty as their superiors (*Westminster Larger Catechism* #129). More specifically, it is the duty of elders to “nourish and guard the children of the covenant” (*Form of Government* X.3).
- b. Protect the good name of the Church and its members and volunteers, and of Christ our Lord, by avoiding situations that might lead to allegations of misconduct, including false allegations. (*Westminster Larger Catechism* #144).
- c. Provide biblically informed guidance to the Presbytery about identifying abuse, reporting abuse, and responding to such reports, especially in light of God’s ordination of civil magistrates “for the defense and encouragement of them that are good, and for the punishment of evildoers” (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, 23.1).

2. Definitions

For the purposes of this policy:

- a. A “child” or “youth” is anyone under the age of 18.
- b. A “youth event” is any program or event involving children that is held by the Presbytery, its committees, or their authorized agents.
- c. A “youth worker” is an adult, appointed by the Presbytery, its committees, or its authorized agents, to serve in a youth event held by the Presbytery.
- d. A “chaperone” is an adult, not appointed by the Presbytery, attending a youth event in a supervisory capacity.
- e. The Presbytery recognizes at least three types of abusive behavior that we are seeking to prevent.
 - i. **Child emotional abuse** is derogatory name-calling and put-downs or persistent and deliberate coldness from a person—to the extent where the behavior of the child is disturbed or their emotional development is at serious risk of being impaired. Serious emotional or psychological abuse

could also result from conduct that exploits a child without necessarily being criminal, such as encouraging a child to engage in inappropriate or risky behaviors.

- ii. **Child physical abuse** is a physical injury inflicted on a child, other than by accidental means, regardless of whether there was an intention to hurt the child. Note: physical discipline such as spanking or paddling is not abusive if it causes no bodily injury.
- iii. **Child sexual abuse** includes 1) sexual contact with a child that is accomplished by force or threat of force, regardless of the age of the participants, 2) all sexual contact between an adult and a child, regardless of whether there is deception or the child understands the sexual nature of the activity, and 3) sexual contact between an older and a younger child where there is a significant disparity in age, mental or physical development, or size, rendering the younger child incapable of resisting. Sexually abusive acts may include sexual penetration, sexual touching, or non-contact sexual acts such as exposure, voyeurism or lewd photography, or solicitation to any such activities. Child sexual abuse also includes any conduct constituting sexual abuse under state law.
- f. The Presbytery encourages everyone to be attentive to **potential indicators of abuse**. These potential indicators include physical symptoms evident on a child's body, as well as emotional symptoms evident in a child's behavior. These indicators are not conclusive evidence of abuse, but they are important clues that we must be attentive to, so that abuse does not go undetected.
- g. The Presbytery recognizes that **effects of abuse**, though often hard to see, can be devastating and long-lasting. These effects may be emotional, physical, or spiritual. We therefore commit ourselves to preventing abuse as far as it is in our power. We also commit ourselves to responding to abuse victims in love, wisdom, and truthfulness.
- h. The Presbytery recognizes that **people who abuse children may** use authority, trust, or physical force and threats to gain access and control over children so they can perpetrate the abuse. These people may be strangers, but more commonly they are acquaintances, close friends, or family members.

3. Youth Workers

- a. Youth workers will be either ministers in the Presbytery or adult communing members of a local church in good standing.
- b. The Presbytery requires screening for all youth workers. This screening will include at least the following steps:
 - i. Reading and signing the "Youth Worker Agreement" (Appendix 1).

- ii. A background check conducted by a professional agency, paid for by the Presbytery.
- iii. Approval by the Christian Education Committee.
- iv. Screening will be repeated at least every three years.
- v. Records of this screening will be maintained by the Christian Education Committee.

4. Safe Behaviors

- a. We will be **transparent**.
 - i. Wherever adults are teaching or caring for youth, they will ensure that they are visible (for example, by keeping an open window and/or an open door).
 - ii. Parents and other adults will be welcome to look in on classrooms and nursery rooms.
 - iii. Youth workers will never counsel a child alone. They will only counsel a child with an open door, and another adult present.
- b. We will be **accountable**.
 - i. The Presbytery, its committees, and their authorized agents will ensure that youth events are supervised by at least two youth workers, not related to each other. For youth events that include boys and girls, at least one of these youth workers will be male, and at least one will be female. For youth events that include only boys or only girls, at least one youth worker will be of the same gender as the youth.
 - ii. At every youth event, the names of the youth workers will be announced, so that any youth can go to them, without special permission, to discuss any problems he or she may be having.
 - iii. The youth workers will conduct a periodic inspection of rooms, offices, bathrooms, and other areas where children and adults are together, or where abuse might occur.
 - iv. Nursery care will be provided by at least one youth worker, who may be assisted by other adults or youth.
 - v. Overnight supervision will be provided to youth of each gender by at least one youth worker, with the assistance of chaperones.
 - vi. To assist the youth workers, chaperones may be employed in other general supervisory capacities.
- c. We will be **clear**.
 - i. Youth workers will model healthy displays of affection. These may include: kind words, high fives, pats on the shoulder, and brief hugs.

- ii. Youth workers will avoid unhealthy touching. These may include: touching any part of a child's body that would be covered by a bathing suit, tickling, playing with hair, lap sitting, prolonged hugs, kisses.
- iii. Youth workers will avoid showing favoritism or special attention to a child or group of children.
- iv. Youth workers will answer children's questions about bodies and sex in a biblical, mature, sanctified, and age-appropriate manner.

5. Transportation

Presbytery, its committees, and their authorized agents, shall not provide any transportation services or oversight of transportation for youth to, from, or during a youth event. Consequently, it shall be the responsibility of parents and/or guardians in conjunction with their local church to secure suitable transportation as needed for their children.

6. Policy Violations

- a. If, in an emergency, a youth worker deems it necessary to deviate from this policy, then the Christian Education Committee should be promptly notified of the exception, and the reason it was necessary, using the "Policy Violation Report" (Appendix 2).
- b. The Presbytery encourages everyone to be observant about the policy's implementation. If a deviation from this policy is observed, everyone is encouraged to remedy the situation, and to report the deviation to the Christian Education Committee, even if there is no suspicion of abuse, using the "Child Safety Incident Report" (Appendix 3).
- c. The Christian Education Committee will maintain records of any reported policy violations and child safety incidents.

7. Responding to Reports of Abuse

- a. For the honor of Christ and the protection of the weak, the Presbytery encourages everyone to make a report if they **witness** abuse, **receive a report** of abuse, or **reasonably suspect** abuse.
- b. Every effort should be made to report promptly and directly to the Christian Education Committee. A verbal report shall be accompanied by a written report (use Appendix 3).
- c. In an emergency, where a child's safety is threatened, call 911.
- d. In the event that abuse is reported, the moderator of the Presbytery shall be promptly informed, ordinarily by a member of the Christian Education Committee. The moderator will coordinate the Presbytery's response, either personally or by appointing a committee.
- e. The Presbytery will observe the following principles in responding to a report of abuse:

- i. Since child abuse is not only a sin, but also a serious crime, it is proper to report child abuse to state authorities who are ordained by God for punishing wickedness (Romans 13:1-5).
- ii. All reports of child abuse should be taken seriously, and the utmost concern should always be shown for the safety of the alleged victim(s).
- iii. Reports should be handled with discretion and due process, without assuming the guilt of the accused. However, anyone accused of child abuse will immediately be removed from caring for children while the report is being investigated.
- iv. Since reports of child abuse often raise sensitive and complex matters, it is proper to enlist assistance from an attorney or other professional.
- v. In the interests of clarity, discretion, and consistency, it is proper to appoint a spokesperson to communicate with the alleged victim(s), the accused, and their families, the churches of the Presbytery, and the media.

8. Dissemination and Maintenance

- a. This policy will be published on the Presbytery's website, along with contact information for the Christian Education Committee.
- b. Printed copies of this policy will be made available at youth events.
- c. The stated clerk will distribute this policy to presbyters at stated meetings of the Presbytery.
- d. The Christian Education Committee will review the policy annually to ensure its proper implementation and to make recommendations to Presbytery about revising it.

9. Mission Works

When the Presbytery organizes a new mission work, it shall ensure that the mission work has its own child protection policy, consistent with the principles laid out in this policy.

APPENDIX 1: YOUTH WORKER AGREEMENT

This form is to be completed by all youth workers.

Answer the following questions, True or False.

Note: The Presbytery will not deny a position to any applicant solely because the person answers “false” to any of the questions below. The Presbytery, however, will consider the information gathered from these answers in determining whether to permit someone to serve as a youth worker.

1. I have never been convicted of, nor pled guilty or no contest to, a crime. (Exclude convictions that have been sealed, expunged or legally eradicated, misdemeanor convictions for which probation was completed and the case was dismissed, or offenses about which inquiry is not permissible in this state. Also exclude infractions such as traffic violations.)

_____ True _____ False

If not true, please briefly describe the nature of the crime(s), the date and place of conviction and the legal disposition of the case.

2. I have never been accused of, participated in, or been convicted of sexual misconduct.

_____ True _____ False

If not true, give a short explanation of the incident. Please indicate the date, nature and place of the incident.

3. No civil lawsuit alleging actual or attempted sexual discrimination, harassment exploitation, or misconduct, physical abuse, or child abuse has ever resulted in a judgment being entered against me, been settled out of court, or been dismissed because the statute of limitations has expired.

_____ True _____ False

If not true, give a short explanation of the lawsuit. Please indicate the date, nature and place of the incident leading to the lawsuit; where the lawsuit was filed; and the precise disposition of the lawsuit.

4. I have never terminated my employment, professional credentials, or service in a volunteer position, or had my employment, professional credentials or authorization to hold a volunteer position terminated for reasons relating to allegations of actual, or

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attempted sexual discrimination, harassment, or physical abuse, or child abuse.

_____ True _____ False

If not true, give a short explanation. Please indicate the date of termination; name, address, and telephone number of employer or volunteer supervisor; and nature of the incident(s) leading to your termination.

Your signature below indicates your agreement with the following statements:

1. I have received a copy of the Presbytery's Child Protection Policy and agree to abide by its terms.
2. I agree to nurture and protect children and never to engage in behavior that may harm them.
3. I agree to do my best to prevent abuse and neglect of children involved in Presbytery youth events.
4. In the event that I observe or hear of any inappropriate behaviors involving children or possible violations of the Child Protection Policy, I agree to immediately report my observations to a member of the Christian Education Committee.
5. I acknowledge my obligation and responsibility to protect children and agree to report known or suspected abuse of children to appropriate church leaders and other authorities in keeping with this policy.
6. I understand that the Presbytery will not tolerate abuse or other harm of children and I agree to comply in spirit and action with this position.
7. I understand that it is my duty to self-report any arrests, charges, investigations, and convictions, or any other information pertaining to my reliability in caring for children.
8. I understand that any false statements or implications made by me in this application or other required documentation shall be considered sufficient cause for discharge or denial of employment or voluntary service.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

APPENDIX 2: POLICY VIOLATION REPORT

This form is to be completed by a youth worker when he or she has found it necessary to deviate from the Child Protection Policy. Submit the completed form to a member of the Christian Education Committee.

Note: this form is only to be used to self-report a policy violation after the fact. To report a policy violation you have witnessed, or if you are concerned about a child's safety, use the Child Safety Incident Report (Appendix 4).

1. Date:

2. Name:

3. Relevant Policy Section:

4. Describe the deviation from policy, and the circumstance that made it necessary.

5. On what date did the deviation occur?

6. Who else was present?

7. Did anyone specifically object to the deviation? If so, list their names.

APPENDIX 3: CHILD SAFETY INCIDENT REPORT

This form is to be completed by anyone who observes any violation of the Child Protection Policy, boundary violations, disclosures of abuse, child safety concerns, or other behavior or allegations of behavior that might jeopardize the safety of a child. Proof or direct knowledge of a behavior or incident is not necessary to submit this form, and so some lines on this form may not be applicable. Provide whatever information you do have, and attach additional sheets if extra space is required. Submit the completed form to a member of the Christian Education Committee.

1. Date of incident, if known.
2. Name(s) and contact information of child(ren) harmed, potentially harmed, or otherwise affected.
3. Name(s) and contact information of individual(s) who accidentally or intentionally violated the Policy, or otherwise harmed or potentially harmed the above child(ren), or who otherwise engaged in concerning behavior.
4. What policy, if any, was violated?
5. Where did the incident or behavior occur?
6. Was there an ongoing activity at the time of the incident?
7. Describe the incident or behavior.
8. Did you witness this incident or behavior firsthand? If not, how did you find out about it?

9. Who was present at the time of the incident or behavior?

10. Who, other than those listed above, knows about this incident or behavior?

11. Have any law enforcement or child protection agencies been contacted about this incident or behavior? If so, please provide the following details about each report:

- Name of Agency
- Date of report
- Means of communicating with the agency
- Report #
- Name of the individual who contacted the agency
- Name(s) of other individual(s) present when agency was contacted

12. Were any child protection professionals or experts, other than those listed above, contacted about this incident or behavior? If so, indicate the individuals or agencies contacted, the date of the contact, and the result of the contact.

13. What additional steps have been, or will be, taken to respond to this incident or behavior?

14. What, if anything, can be done to prevent future similar incidents or behaviors or improve response procedures?

15. Individual submitting this report:

Name:

Signature:

Date: