

Children and Youth Protection Policy

At Ebenezer Presbyterian Church, Associate Reformed

*"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them,
for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." Luke 18:16*

1. MISSION STATEMENT

The children and youth ministries at Ebenezer Presbyterian Church, Associate Reformed (EPC) provide opportunities and resources for children and youth to be involved in the church's mission of building a community in Christ to reach a community for Christ.

This policy is to ensure that EPC is a safe and loving place for children and youth to grow in faith, increase in knowledge and experience what it means to be a Christian.

2. SOUTH CAROLINA'S CHILD ABUSE LAWS

Under South Carolina law Section 20-7-490, a child is a person under the age of eighteen.

Child abuse or neglect occurs when the physical or mental health or welfare of a child is harmed or threatened with harm by the persons responsible for the child's welfare. This includes sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse and neglect

3. RESPONSIBILITIES OF EPC

A. The Church

As followers of Christ, we are responsible for providing love, care and support that reflects God's own relationship with His children, for providing Christian fellowship and education, and for providing loving outreach, to church attendees-from the oldest to the youngest- of our worship services, Sunday School, activities and programs.

EPC is responsible for the safety and well-being of children and youth. We are responsible both to the parents of the children and youth and to the legal authorities for having our facilities meet appropriate standards of physical and emotional safety and due care.

We strive to encourage and protect our staff, paid workers, and volunteers with policies and procedures related to child protection, appropriate behavior, discipline and by providing continuing education.

B. Staff

The Staff is expected to be responsible to the EPC leadership and required to have a full understanding of these Children and Youth Protection Policy. Staff personnel must pass background checks to establish that they have no criminal record or history of child abuse. Members of the staff will attend training related to child protection and shall be cognizant of their responsibilities in the event of an allegation of child abuse.

Staff refers to all paid full and part-time employees.

C. Paid Childcare Workers (Contracted)

Paid childcare workers are responsible for knowing both EPC church policy and South Carolina law regarding child abuse and protection. The Contractor must provide background checks and proof of child protection training. The worker will be required to read EPC's policy and sign an Acknowledgement Form before beginning their duties. The worker is responsible for implementing and abiding by EPC written policy on child protection and classroom discipline.

D. Volunteer Workers in Children and Youth Ministries

Volunteer workers in children and youth ministries are responsible for knowing EPC's policy before being permitted to work with the children or youth. **ADULT volunteers must pass a background check intended to establish that they have no criminal record or history of child abuse before they will be permitted to work with children or youth.** Volunteers should be aware that the potential for child abuse exists and that they are part of our efforts at prevention. They are responsible for abiding by EPC's written policy on child and youth protection and classroom discipline. Volunteers are asked to prayerfully consider their calling to children and youth ministries before participating in the work.

E. Community Groups Using EPC Facilities

Leaders/Representatives of community groups desiring to use our facilities and who have children in their program or who require childcare must read, agree to adhere to, and sign our Child and Youth Protection Policy before being permitted to use facilities belonging to EPC. Any such groups having no affiliation with EPC must provide a certificate of insurance with EPC named as additional insured.

F. Sub-Contract Work

The Deacons will review each proposed contract with outside vendors who will perform work at EPC on an individual basis to determine the appropriate measures necessary to protect children and youth during the performance of the vendor's work and will include provisions incorporating those measures into such contracts.

4. GUIDELINES OF CHILD/YOUTH PROTECTION AT EPC

To create a safe environment for children at EPC, we will continue to follow physical safety policies and will use additional protection measures as follows:

A. Six Month Rule for Volunteers

EPC requires that volunteer church workers in children or youth programs be actively involved in the church for six months before beginning responsibilities. We make every effort to place new workers with experienced volunteers. Ordinarily, volunteers are active members.

B. Worker Screening

Staff

All staff will be asked to sign a Screening form containing a statement that they have never been convicted of child abuse as an adult or juvenile nor had such a conviction expunged. Applicants refusing to sign the Screening Form will not be hired. In addition, applicants for staff positions will undergo a background check, and will not be hired if they have been convicted of any sexual or violent crimes or any offense against a minor.

Volunteers

In order to ensure that we have responsible people working in any area of the life of the church, those responsible for recruiting volunteers are to first pray for the Lord's guidance before approaching potential volunteers. Individuals are then asked to prayerfully consider their calling toward a given

ministry before committing to such service. In this way, we trust that the volunteers working in children and youth programs feel the Lord calls them to this ministry and are prepared for and gifted to do the work.

All volunteer workers in children and youth ministries shall read, sign and comply with these Children and Youth Protection Policy and any modifications or amendments made to this policy. ADULT volunteers will also undergo a background check intended to establish that they have no criminal record nor history of child abuse.

C. Child Protection Training

Church leaders, volunteer workers and paid staff working with children and youth will be required to attend a Training Session related to the Children and Youth Protection Policy. Child Protection Training will be incorporated into the Inquirer's Class for perspective members. Ongoing training will be offered at least once a year and as needed for new staff and volunteers.

D. Adult Supervision Procedures

Two Worker Rule

Workers in children and youth ministries are encouraged not be alone with children at any time, for the protection of both the children and the worker. EPC will strive to assign two or more teachers and leaders to children's classrooms and group activities.

Open Classroom Policy

Classrooms may be viewed from doorways or windows at any time. Prior notice by church staff, parents, grandparents, guardian, or other volunteer church workers is not required. When viewing classroom activities, please be sensitive about causing teacher/student disruptions.

Supervision of Mixed Gender Groups

When a group includes both boys and girls, both male and female leaders must be present if the group: 1) stays overnight at the church or 2) leaves the premises for overnight trips,.

Field Trip Policy

The provisions of this Children and Youth Protection Policy apply to all field trips under the auspices of EPC.

- Field trips must be adequately supervised.
- A signed parental consent form with authorization for emergency medical care is required for such trips.
- When field trips are overnight events and adults must share a room with the children or youth, the adult must have his or her own bed.
- When someone other than the assigned leader will be driving the child or youth home or to another location after the group meeting, then the parents of the child or youth must give permission for the change in transportation.

E. Teacher/Leader Expectations

The church is committed to providing children and families with a safe and caring environment for being and making disciples of Jesus Christ. Positive learning experiences enable children to develop a strong sense of self worth. The following guidelines are intended to facilitate such learning experiences. Teachers and leaders are:

- 1) to serve as role models for children and youth by showing God's love in all interactions.
- 2) to be respectful of the children, their experiences, and feelings, and encourage them to show respect in return.
- 3) to provide positive learning experiences by preparing well-planned age appropriate activities.
- 4) to explain and consistently encourage all children to participate in following classroom/group rules.
- 5) to reinforce good behavior with praise and to respond firmly but lovingly to inappropriate behavior, physical or verbal, that may jeopardize the safety and/or learning experiences of others.
- 6) not to use corporal punishment.

In the event of inappropriate behavior not remedied by number 5 above, the leader/teacher may remove the child from the group. An Initiative Team member should be consulted and the parent or guardian informed of the inappropriate behavior. When needed, a follow-up meeting time will be set to determine an agreeable course of action. This meeting should be comprised of the parent or guardian, child, teacher or leader and at least one member of the Initiative Team. It is recommended that an Elder Undershepherd always be included in this meeting.

An Incident Form is to be filled out and kept on file with the Initiative Team.

*The Initiative Team will consist of the Senior Minister and/or designee and the assigned Elder Undershepherd.

F. Guidelines For Policy Violations Not Constituting Child Abuse

If an action is observed that violates EPC's Children and Youth Protection Policy but is not a child abuse incident, the following guidelines are to be followed:

Member/Visitor

A. The person shall be provided a copy of EPC's Children and Youth Protection Policy

B. When inappropriate behavior persists, the person will meet with the Initiative Team who will review the circumstances and resolve the issue in the best interest of the children. Persistent policy violations shall be recorded on the Incident Form and kept on file in the church office.

Volunteer

A. A volunteer acting in such a manner may be: 1) encouraged to review the disciplinary and child protection policy or 2) approached by a member of the Initiative Team and reminded of the disciplinary and child protection policy.

B. When inappropriate behavior persists, the volunteer will meet with the Initiative Team who will review the circumstances and resolve the issue in the best interest of the children. This could include temporary suspension or permanent removal from the children and youth ministry programs. The choice of consequences will reflect the severity of the offense. Persistent policy violations shall be recorded on the Incident Form and kept on file in the church office.

Staff

A. An employee acting in such a manner may be 1) encouraged by the Senior Minister to review the disciplinary and child protection policy or 2) approached by the Chairman of the Personnel Committee and reminded of the disciplinary and child protection policy.

B. When inappropriate behavior persists, the employee will meet with the Personnel Committee who will review the circumstances and resolve the issue in the best interest of the children. This could include temporary suspension or removal from the children and youth ministry programs, with or without notice, depending on the severity of the offense. Persistent policy violations shall be recorded on the Incident Form and kept on file in the church office.

5. EPC POLICY AND PROCEDURE FOR REPORTING CHILD ABUSE

There are two possible situations requiring immediate action on the part of EPC, its members, staff and volunteers. If there should be allegations of child abuse at EPC or if a child coming to EPC exhibits signs of abuse occurring away from the church setting, the procedures below shall be followed. Due to the serious, sensitive nature of such a crisis and the potential harmful effects both to the child and to the accused of false accusations and unrestrained gossip, the strictest confidentiality will be observed throughout the reporting process.

In order to minimize confusion and talk, anyone associated with EPC children or youth programs that observes or has reason to suspect abuse, should report these observations/suspicions directly to the Initiative Team. (The Initiative Team will consist of the Senior Minister and/or designee and the assigned Elder Undershepherd.)

If the Senior Minister is the one accused, the head of the relevant program will report the allegation directly to the Stated Clerk of the Session.

1. Treat any allegation of child abuse seriously; do not ignore the issue in the hope that it will go away. Any individual observing acts of abuse occurring at EPC or suspecting abuse having occurred, even if away from EPC, should report the suspected abuse to the Initiative Team.*
2. The individual reporting the abuse shall:
 - a) verbally report to the Initiative Team (ie Sr. Pastor or assigned undershepherd)
 - b) complete the Incident Form
 - c) maintain strict confidentiality; any further discussion of the incident should only be with members of the Initiative Team.
3. The Initiative Team shall:
 - a) review the Incident Form to ensure clarity and understanding
 - b) report the incident to DSS (803-684-2315), as per state regulations
 - c) make other appropriate notifications after consultation with DSS
 - d) notify the church's insurance company in accordance with the policy provisions
 - e) document findings on the Incident Form
4. If the accused has assigned duties within the life of the church, that person must be temporarily relieved of his/her duties until the investigation is concluded.
5. The Senior Minister should extend whatever care and resources necessary to both the victim of the suspected abuse and the accused, but under no circumstances should anyone other than the proper authorities investigate the allegations or be drawn into a discussion of the truth or falsity of the allegation. Do not assign blame or take any steps that involve establishing or refuting the allegation.

6. It is appropriate to show care, comfort and reassurance for all persons affected and to pray for an atmosphere of healing in the church.
7. Observe confidentiality for both the alleged victim, the accused and the individual reporting the incident throughout the investigation.
8. Public inquiries will be directed to the Senior Minister or designee.

6. POLICY REVIEW

The Children and Youth Protection Policy at EPC shall be reviewed annually by the Session 30 days prior to the anniversary date of EPC's insurance policy. Amendments or changes to this policy are to be submitted to the Session for approval and implementation.

7. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

The Children and Youth Protection Policy will go into effect upon approval of the Session. All church members shall be informed of this policy. Staff and volunteers in the children or youth programs will be given a copy of this policy and required to sign the Acknowledgement Form within ____ (d/w/m) of the policy's effective date. Within ____ (d/w/m) of the policy effective date, background checks will be initiated on all staff and volunteers in the children and youth programs/activities.

Leaders in the children and youth programs of EPC are to implement this policy. This policy does not take the place of or invalidate existing policies.