

Wetzel Road Church of Christ: Risk Policies and Procedures

SCRIPTURAL BASE:

People are created in the image of God. Because they are created by God, they deserve care, respect, and honor. God calls believers to share our lives together in the Church, which is the body of Christ. We are His family, and therefore each person is valuable and indispensable.

We recognize because of Satan's attacks, that our sinfulness and denial can blind us to the vulnerability of people, in particular our children and youth. In today's world, the communication of children and youth is often silenced, distorted, or not heard at all. This is despite Jesus' instruction, "*Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these.*" Since we desire to follow His calling, we seek to welcome and care for children and youth.

We want our church building and our events to serve as a sanctuary, where safety and grace are extended and received. Just as Jesus invites everyone to come and follow, we hope all people will find a home among us. At the same time, we have and will continue to take appropriate measures to protect the flock against ravenous wolves who masquerade in sheep's clothing. Since the Church serves as a representation of God's Kingdom, we are called as Christ's ambassadors to make this building and all our activities a place of health and safety, a place where God's peace reigns and the kingdom can flourish.

This policy outlines the Wetzel Road Church of Christ's expectations for appropriate behavior regarding the care and supervision of children and youth. We strive to create a safe place, where abusive words and actions are not tolerated and our staff and volunteers are protected from wrongful allegations. ***In summary, we hold zero tolerance for any form of abuse.***

The abuse of children in our nation has touched all areas of society. As a result of this, the Wetzel Road Church of Christ uses the following RISK Policies and Procedures. This document is applicable to all church leadership personnel (Elders, deacons, ministers, and other paid staff) and all volunteers (which includes: chaperons, teachers, ministry leaders and all other volunteers).

The RISK Team will consist of at least three individuals (Elder; Minister; Female Member).

POLICY & PROCEDURE REVIEW AND REVISION PROCESS:

1. Annually, the RISK Team will review the RISK Policies and Procedures Manual.
2. Following the RISK Team's review of the RISK Policies and Procedures, they will supply the Elders/Ministers and congregation with the approved RISK Policy & Procedures Manual.
3. Process for revising (or adding) a policy and/or procedure:
 - a. The revision (or addition) of a policy and/or procedure may be submitted by a member of the Wetzel Road Church of Christ to a RISK Team member, who will then submit the revision (or addition) to the RISK Team.
 - b. The Risk Team will then consider revision (or addition) during a RISK Team meeting.
 - c. Unanimous approval or the revision (or addition) by the RISK Team member is required for that revision (or addition).
 - d. Then a selected RISK Team member will present the revision (or addition) to Elders/Ministers for their required approval.
 - e. If deemed necessary by the RISK Team, communication of the revision (or addition) will be made to the congregation.

DEFINITIONS & TERMINOLOGY: CAPTA (Child Abuse Prevention & Treatment Act)

The CAPTA definition of sexual abuse includes: The employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement, or coercion of any child to engage in, or assist any other person to engage in, any sexually explicit conduct or simulation of such conduct for the purpose of producing a visual depiction of such conduct; or The rape, and in cases of caretaker or interfamilial relationships, statutory rape, molestation, prostitution, or other form of sexual exploitation of children, or incest with children

Types of Abuse States recognize the different types of abuse in their definitions, including physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse. Some States also provide definitions in statute for parental substance abuse and/or for abandonment as child abuse.

Physical Abuse is generally defined as “*any nonaccidental physical injury to the child*” and can include striking, kicking, burning, or biting the child, or any action that results in a physical impairment of the child.

Neglect is frequently defined as “*the failure of a parent or other person with responsibility for the child to provide needed food, clothing, shelter, medical care, or supervision to the degree that the child’s health, safety, and well-being are threatened with harm.*”

Sexual Abuse/Exploitation includes allowing the child to engage in prostitution or in the production of child pornography.

Typical language used in these definitions is “*injury to the psychological capacity or emotional stability of the child as evidenced by an observable or substantial change in behavior, emotional response, or cognition*” and injury as evidenced by “*anxiety, depression, withdrawal, or aggressive behavior.*”

TEAM MEMBER PROCESS:

1. The RISK Team will, at a minimum, consist of: one minister; one elder; one female. All must be members of the Wetzel Road Church of Christ and annually approved by the Eldership.
2. The RISK Team may at any point, decide a RISK Team member(s) need to be added or removed. The process for adding or removing RISK Team member(s) is as follows.
The RISK Team will inform the congregation of the team’s desire/need to add a new member(s). Or at any point a Wetzel Road Church of Christ member may request consideration for being selected to serve on the RISK Team. The RISK Team will then consider each applicant to determine the Team’s need for that applicant to serve on the RISK Team. Chosen applicant(s) will be interviewed by a designated RISK Team member. Then the RISK Team will decide whether to or not to recommend the applicant(s) for Elder/Minister approval. Upon Elder/Minister approval the chosen applicant(s) will be informed of RISK Team’s decision, followed by informing the Wetzel Road Church of Christ members of a new team member’s addition.
3. The RISK Team’s process for the consideration of team member(s) removal is as follows. A RISK Team member will inform the RISK Team (as a whole) that they think a certain RISK Team member needs to be removed. Then the RISK Team members must unanimously agree the named RISK team member needs to be removed. The RISK Team will then inform the Elders/Ministers of the RISK Team’s decision. With Elders/Ministers approval, the RISK Team will inform that team member of the decision, which will then be communicated to the Wetzel Road Church of Christ members.

SPOKESPERSON:

Annually the RISK Team will appoint a spokesperson for the ministry. This person must be approved by that calendar year’s/current Eldership. This designated *Spokesperson* will be the only authorized person to handle any media requests and/or needs for the Wetzel Road Church of Christ in regards to RISK related items and/or events for that calendar year.

DESIGNATED HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL:

Annually the RISK Team will ask one person to serve as the designated *health care professional*. This person must be a member of the Wetzel Road Church of Christ and recognized as a health care professional.

The primary task of the designated *health care professional* will be to assist the RISK Team as needed; i.e., any medical-related policy decisions and implementation and/or follow-through procedures.

VOLUNTEER SCREENING PROCESS:

1. The screening procedure for all volunteers interested in ministering is:
 - a. Ministry Application
 - b. Background/registry check (church and/or local authorities)
 - c. Interview by a RISK Team member
 - d. Approval of the RISK Team
2. A criminal background check will be annually completed on all church employees: Elders, paid Ministers and Staff and others the RISK Team chooses.
 - Refusal to consent to a background check will disqualify an applicant from being able to serve
 - Any applicant with a conviction for abuse against any child/adult cannot be engaged in any capacity that would bring them into contact with a child/youth.
3. New members of the Wetzel Road Church of Christ will be subject to a six-month waiting period before being utilized in volunteer positions which involve contact with children.
 - Exceptions to the six-month waiting period may be permitted on a case-by-case basis provided the RISK Team receives confirmation from the previous congregation and/or Elder approval. This letter will be kept in the applicant's file.
4. A file will be maintained of each individual who completes an application form. All materials in the individual's file including, but not limited to the application, background checks, interview, etc. will be held in strict confidence by the church via the RISK Team.
5. Potential volunteers who are adult survivors of child abuse may be required to meet with a RISK Team member and/or Elder prior to working within a ministry area involving children/youth.
6. Every 5 years all applications and/or screenings will be updated by the RISK Team.

VOLUNTEER TRAINING:

In order to be an Approved Adult, a volunteer or staff member must participate in an initial training that covers recognizing and responding to child abuse, mandated reporting requirements, and church guidelines and practices.

All Approved Adults and staff, upon completion of their training, will receive a copy of the RISK Policies & Procedures Manual and documentation of their training requirements completion.

VOLUNTEER TRAINING PROCEDURES:

Staff and Volunteers:

1. Training is offered once a year. It is a mandatory part of volunteer training and/or employee orientation for those in a supervisory role and recommended for all others. The initial training for each new staff person and volunteer will be conducted by the RISK Team.
2. Once an individual has participated in the initial training, a refresher-training will be provided as needed to ensure the volunteer's/staff's knowledge is up to date.
3. A designated RISK Team member will maintain a record of who has completed the assigned training material and the dates.

4. Training will include the use of professional training materials on child safety and/or abuse, including specific information about:
 - Child abuse, behavioral signs, and how to respond to a disclosure of abuse
 - Grooming process sexual offenders often use to engage children
 - Review of policies and procedures; facility layout; event highlights
 - *I said No* materials
 - Use and completion of the various forms

Members of the RISK Team may be required to attend other additional child neglect and abuse training sessions, as deemed necessary.

VOLUNTEER SUPERVISION GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES:

1. Every attempt will be made to provide two volunteers with children/youth at all times during scheduled activities on or off campus.
 - The ‘two volunteer’ rule prohibits ‘one volunteer’ being in an isolated/removed setting with a child without another volunteer being present.
 - Observation of this rule serves not only to protect the child/youth, but also to protect the volunteer(s) against the possibility of false accusations.
2. In the top portion of all classroom doors there will be a window. This window will not be covered. Doors will be left open if one volunteer has to leave the classroom and remain open until the second volunteer returns. Classrooms will never be locked when children/youth are in the room.
3. A volunteer will never visit or spend time with a child/youth in seclusion. If a volunteer needs to personally address a child/youth, they will step into the hallway while still in view of other volunteers.
4. Supervision from a volunteer cannot begin until two volunteers are present. Supervision by two volunteers will be maintained after an event until all children/youth are in the custody of the parent and/or legal guardian or someone pre-approved, designated by the parent and/or legal guardian.
5. When children/youth are transported for church activities, they must be transported in groups with at least one Approved Adult in each vehicle. An Approved Adult cannot transport any less than two children in his or her vehicle unless accompanied by another adult (the 2nd adult does not have to be an Approved Adult). The only exception to this transportation policy is when a parent/guardian of the child and/or youth completes a transportation permission form which has been approved by a RISK Team member. Note, with their parents’/guardians’ permission, a youth may drive himself or herself and take student passengers to youth activities if there is a signed transportation permission form from all parents involved and is approved by a RISK Team member.
6. To transport children/youth in a personal vehicle, the driver must be twenty-one years of age or older. Drivers must have a minimum of one year driving experience after receiving his/her license and adequate insurance (*liability insurance of \$25,000 to bodily injury to one person of \$50,000; bodily injury to all persons, and \$10,000 to property damage in any one accident; with a mandatory "no-fault" provision of \$50,000*) coverage. Those driving must have a copy of their driver’s license, registration, and proof of insurance on file in the church office. This will be updated on a yearly basis. Anyone who has had their license revoked or suspended within the past five years will be ineligible to drive for youth activities.

Drivers must obey all traffic laws (i.e. speed limits; mobile devices; etc.). All occupants must wear a seatbelt. For events out of town, drivers are encouraged to stop every two hours, with a limit of three hours. Breaks from driving should be for a period of at least ten minutes. Drivers should not drive for more than eight hours within twenty-four hours.

Vehicles used for transporting children and youth must be in good working order; have an up-to-date inspection and current registration.

7. With supervising children in regards to the restrooms, here are the general guidelines:
 - a. No adults may be in the restroom with a child (exception: as needed in nursery and preschool classes)
 - b. Children are encouraged to go to the restroom with a classroom buddy, chosen by the teacher or volunteer
 - c. If a child needs assistance in the restroom, the adult may assist the child at the entrance of the restroom with the restroom door remaining open at all times
8. All children/youth should be encouraged to sit on their own chairs. Often though it is beneficial and/or necessary for children in Preschool and/or lower elementary grades, to sit in the lap of the teacher and or volunteers.
9. With clear biblical teaching regarding sexual contact only being appropriate in marriage between a husband and wife, anyone known to be sexually active outside of marriage or having the appearance of an inappropriate relationship will not be allowed to serve.
10. Corporal, physical punishment of any kind by a staff or volunteer is **never** appropriate in the church setting. Anyone who participates in this type of punishment will be immediately removed from the classroom/program and the parent and/or legal guardian will be notified. This individual will not be allowed to participate again until after being cleared by the RISK Team. Documentation will be placed in their personal file and if deemed appropriate, local authorities shall be contacted.

NOTE 1: Children with behavior problems should be taken directly to their parent and/or legal guardian or the parent and/or legal guardian should be brought to the classroom.

NOTE 2: If a youth has a behavior problem, the teacher and/or volunteer should ask the youth to leave the classroom and/or area and their parent and/or legal should be immediately notified.
11. Church staff, Elders, and/or RISK Team members may make unscheduled, unannounced visits into classrooms or program venues.

HEAD LICE PROTOCOL:

If someone is suspected of carrying lice, a RISK Team member will be notified. The RISK Team member will then (in private) isolate that person so they can be checked by the designated health care professional.

The designated health care professional will then determine:

1. Yes or no (person is carrying lice or has nits)
2. Next step(s) to follow of the RISK Team protocol

If yes (person is carrying lice or has nits):

1. Person will be kept isolated and the parent notified if the person is a youth or a child.
2. The designated health care professional may also recommend the checking of family members or classmates.

Note: if classmates are checked, parents and teachers (ministry leaders) will be notified by the designated health care professional or a RISK Team member.
3. Upon return, a person (or family members) will be checked by the designated health care professional before rejoining any groups or church as a whole.
4. If necessary, pieces of furniture or whole rooms may need to be inspected and treated. If this is necessary, the RISK Team with the assistance of the designated health care professional will decide upon the action to be taken.

PRIVACY POLICY: PERSONAL INFORMATION, RECORDINGS & IMAGES:

The purpose of this policy is to manage the use of recordings/images and other personal information that may be used in any church publications.

Personal Information Policy:

We have several basic groups of people that might be listed or referred to in our communications: Elders, Ministers, Deacons, Ministry Leaders, adult members (and their youth/children), and visitors.

1. For Elders, Ministers, Deacons, and Ministry Leaders, we list names, email addresses, and/or phone numbers.
2. For adult members (and their youth/children) we will not list personal email addresses or phone numbers unless having been given permission.
3. For our youth and children, we will not list any personal information. Any recordings/images of our youth or children (*which are used only with parental permission; see below*) will never have the children's names in the caption.
4. For visitors, we will not internally distribute any personal information to the congregation (name or contact information) without having been given permission.

Image Use Policy

It is a privilege for us to include images of church members and visitors at events at Wetzel Road in our publications. We want to respect and honor that privilege when we share what's happening in our church. Worship services, Bible classes, and Special Events and any other church-related activities, may be recorded and used in church publications. Wetzel Road uses recordings/images to capture and celebrate God's work *and so that visitors can know what to expect*. However, because the dissemination of online recordings/images cannot be tightly controlled, it is Wetzel Road's policy to protect the privacy of church members and visitors, their children, and other individuals whose recordings/images we publish.

1. If you are an adult, your image may be used for any publication of Wetzel Road unless you fill out a *Media/Image Use Opt-Out Form* (church office).
2. We will not put names as captions with recordings/images (except for ministers, staff, or other adult members) unless given expressed written consent.
3. We will not use recordings/images of any child outside our church membership unless their parent or guardian fills out the *Media/Image Use Permission Form*. And, at no point will the child's name be included with the child's image.
4. We will not knowingly use any recording/image that would be embarrassing, objectionable or hurtful to anyone in the image.
5. We will gladly remove any recording/image, immediately upon request. If you see any recording/image that includes you or your child and would like it removed, please contact the church office with the details, and it will be removed as soon as possible. (*Please note that we cannot control recordings/images posted to sites that are not under the control of the Wetzel Road staff.*)
6. If you submit recordings/images to be used by Wetzel Road, you are giving the church the right to use the recordings/image in any kind of promotion for the church. These recordings/images must also not contain any copyrighted material for which permission has not been received.
7. We will return any submitted physical recordings/images when requested
8. Any recording/image made at church events are the property of Wetzel Road; therefore any designated person tasked with this assignment agrees to not duplicate any recordings/images and to submit all those recording/image to the church and permanently removed from their personal equipment.

RESPONSE AND REPORTING OF ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE:

1. New York State has statutes identifying mandatory reporters of child maltreatment and under what circumstances they are to report. A mandatory reporter is a person who is required by law to make a report of suspected abuse or neglect. In New York, “Clergy” (elders, ministry staff and Bible class teachers) are not mandatory reporters but any person, however, should report suspicions of abuse or neglect. ‘Standard of Knowledge’ in New York is defined as:

Reasonable cause to suspect that a child coming before them in their professional or official capacity is an abused or maltreated child, or reasonable cause to suspect that a child is an abused or maltreated child where the parent, guardian, custodian, or other person legally responsible for such child comes before them in their professional or official capacity and states from personal knowledge facts, conditions, or circumstances which, if correct, would render the child an abused or maltreated child.

 - Mandatory reporters are required to report suspected abuse even if it occurs in a situation unrelated to their professional role.
 - A person who reports suspected neglect or abuse in “good faith” is “fully” immune from criminal and civil liability. Church leaders (Elders) and Ministers may make such reports without violation of the ‘clergy-penitent’ confidential communication privilege.
 - The reporting requirement does not apply to the discovery or neglect that occurred during childhood if it is discovered after the child/youth has entered into adulthood. However, if there is reasonable cause to believe other children are or may be at risk of abuse or neglect by the accused, the same reporting requirements apply.
2. A mandatory reporter must make an oral report within forty-eight hours of the time they first learn of the neglect or abuse.
 - Reports of child abuse and neglect can be made 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by calling the New York State Central Register (SCR) Child Abuse and Maltreatment Hotline. All calls are confidential. SCR works in conjunction with ACS (Administration of Child Services).
 - When making a report, you will be asked for the following information:
 - the name and address of the child and family members
 - the child's age, sex, and primary language
 - the nature and extent of the child's injuries
 - the type of abuse or neglect, including evidence of prior history of maltreatment of the child or siblings
 - additional information that may be helpful.
 - PHONE NUMBERS:
 - Mandated Reporters: 1-800-635-1522
 - General Public: 1-800-342-3720
 - Call 911, if a child is in immediate danger
3. RISK Team Members (individually or as group) should be notified immediately of any concern or threat to a child and/or youth. Notification will be documented and followed up by the RISK Team Member, using the ‘Report of Suspected Incident of Child/Youth Abuse’ form.

FAILURE TO REPORT:

1. All allegations of child abuse will be taken seriously and acted upon. All accusations will be reported in a timely manner to the appropriate local law enforcement agency (see above). All situations will be handled in accordance with local law, as far as possible, in respect to the privacy and confidentiality of all parties concerned. Those persons involved will cooperate fully with local authorities while providing the appropriate care to the members involved.

2. The priority order is first the care and safety of the alleged victim. Second, once the safety of the alleged victim is secured the proper local authorities/agencies shall be notified.
If there is an investigation of the adult, by either the local authorities/agencies or the Risk Team, that adult will be relieved temporarily of all duties and access (with pay, if a paid employee) until the outcome of the investigation and the determination of both the local authority/agency and the Risk Team.
3. Any paid staff member and/or church leader found to have been engaged in child neglect, abuse, or inappropriate behavior towards a child/youth shall be subject to immediate dismissal and in addition to any civil, judicial discipline. Non-paid adults and/or church leaders found to have been engaged in child neglect, abuse, or inappropriate behavior towards a child/youth shall be subject to discipline from the church in addition to any civil, judicial discipline.
4. Any adult attending the Wetzel Road Church of Christ known to have previously been accused or convicted of child/youth neglect or abuse, regardless of their ‘Risk Level’ (see below), will not be allowed to have unsupervised access and/or contact with any child/youth during church-sponsored activities, on or off-site. Specific areas of the Wetzel Road Church of Christ campus may be designated as “off limits” to such adults. Additionally, the Children’s and Youth Ministry leaders are to be immediately notified of the adult’s history and the imposed restrictions.

Level 1 – Person is listed as a sex offender with low risk of reoffending

Level 2 – Person is listed as a sex offender with moderate risk to reoffend

Level 3 – Person is listed as a sex offender with high risk to reoffend and threat to public safety

Pending – Individual has been convicted of a sex crime but not yet assigned a risk level

NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) Sex Offender Registry

COMPLIANCE:

1. All volunteers for the Wetzel Road Church of Christ will have a background check. The NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) Sex Offender Registry recommends all prospective employees regardless of their job title/responsibilities or employment status (full or part-time) be checked against the registry.
2. Written documentation that the adult has been screened through the registry must be kept on file and available for updating by RISK Team Members.
3. Every paid staff member, Elder, Deacon or other coordinator (deemed by the RISK Team) assigned in the areas of children/youth are responsible for carrying out the provisions set forth in this policy.
4. The RISK Team is responsible for annually (or as deemed appropriate) instructing all staff members, Elders, and volunteers of the policies and procedures in this document.
5. All volunteers with children/youth are responsible for familiarizing themselves and abiding by the policy and procedures set forth in this document.

CONCLUSION:

The goal of this policy is the prevention of neglect, abuse, molestation and exploitation of children/youth, and the training and protection of their ministry staff (Elders, paid staff and volunteers). Children/youth have little or no power to stop or prevent neglect or abuse. God, and the state of New York, has empowered us to care and speak for them. Adoption of these policies and procedures will enable us, the Wetzel Road Church of Christ, to provide a safer and more secure environment for each child/youth.

All parents and other congregational members are encouraged to participate in the annual RISK Team meeting and utilize the resources provided by the RISK Team ministry.