

SAMPLE

Children and Youth Protection Policy

[_____ Presbyterian Church]

[Adoption Date]

I. General Purpose Statement

_____ (“Church”) seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children and youth who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the following practices, our goal is to protect the children and youth of _____ Church from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteers from false accusations.

II. Biblical Foundation:

“And they were bringing children to Him, that He might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it He was indignant, and said to them, Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it. And He took them in His arms and blessed them, laying His hands upon them”.
Mark 10:13-16

The Bible is foundational to our understanding upon which all policies, procedures and ministries must stand. Our goal in response to this Biblical mandate is to maintain a safe, secure and loving place where children, youth and vulnerable adults may grow.

III. Definitions

A. Paid Child Caregiver

Any person who works with children or youth for salary or wages at _____ Church.

B. Adult Volunteer

Any person not employed by _____ Church who, at any time during the year, teaches, supervises, or helps with children and youth activities, or is in the presence of children or youth. These activities include, but not limited to, nursery, preschool, children’s worship, kids’ Sunday club, children’s events, youth Sunday school, youth group, and youth events.

C. Youth Volunteer

We recognize that there may be times when it is necessary or desirable for babysitters or classroom helpers (paid or volunteer) who are themselves under age 18 to assist in caring for children during programs or activities. The following guidelines apply to such workers:

- Teenage volunteers must be at least in the sixth grade.
- Teenage volunteers must be under the supervision of an adult and must never be left alone with children.
- All youth volunteers shall complete an application and shall not be counted as the “second

adult". Youth volunteers shall not change diapers, take children to the bathroom, or be put in any one on one situation.

D. Paid Youth Helper

Any youth, ages 16-17, with a valid identification may be employed to serve in a case where a second adult helper is needed.

- The paid youth helper will assist with the older children and the paid adult child caregiver will handle diaper changing and restroom trips.
- In accordance with Child/Youth protection Policy, all paid youth helpers shall complete an application.

E. Church Sponsored Activity

Includes any and all gatherings that arise from any worship, educational, childcare, fellowship, administrative, pastoral, mission or recreational event generated or organized by _____ Church, whether on-campus or off-campus.

F. Volunteer Ministry

Includes any church sponsored activity engaged in by a volunteer.

G. Child or Youth

Persons under 18 years old and considered a minor under the law. This term shall also include legally incompetent persons.

IV. Selection of Workers

All employees and all persons who desire to work with the children participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes the following:

1. Required Background Checks

_____ Church will not allow anyone to volunteer or work with children or youth without a current, completed background check on file. Completed background checks shall remain on file and are effective for a period of three years. New background checks must be completed every 3 years.

2. Staff Screening/Training

Before beginning their first year of service, all paid and volunteer leaders, child care workers, children and youth Sunday School teachers and youth workers will be required to read the church's Child Protection Policy and sign a form indicating that they have read, understand the policy, and agree to abide by it. Anyone failing to do so will not be permitted to serve until the policy has been read and the form signed.

3. Community Groups

Leaders of community groups of children or youth who use the church facility, including its outdoor facilities, would be required to read the policy and sign the acknowledgement form. Church facilities, including outdoor facilities, will not be available to groups whose leaders refuse to read and sign the policy.

4. Six Month Rule

No volunteer will be considered for any position involving contact with children until s/he has been involved with _____ Church for a minimum of six (6) months. This time of interaction between our leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation and suitability of the applicant for working with children. *For*

any new residents the six month rule may be waived after a personal interview and recommendation from their previous church.

5. Necessary Forms

All prospective volunteers will obtain the necessary application form from the [Minister to the Youth or Minister to the Children or applicable position at your church]. In addition to the form, a packet of material will be provided consisting of the following:

- A cover letter stating the need for the process and advising the applicant that all responses will remain confidential and that if he or she is at all uncomfortable with the application or any of its questions, the [Minister to Children or Minister to Youth or applicable role] is available to discuss the matter.
- The _____ Church Presbyterian Child/Youth Protection Policy.
- Information about child abuse.

V. Virginia's Child Abuse Law

Under Section 63.2-100 of the Code of Virginia, an abused child is defined as someone who is less than eighteen years of age,

- i. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care creates or inflicts, threatens to create or inflict, or allows to be created or inflicted upon such child a physical or mental injury by other than accidental means, or creates a substantial risk of death, disfigurement, or impairment of bodily or mental functions, including but not limited to, a child who is with his parent or other person responsible for his care either (i) during the manufacture or attempted manufacture of a Schedule I or II controlled substance, or (ii) during the unlawful sale of such substance by that child's parents or other person responsible for his care, where such manufacture, or attempted manufacture or unlawful sale would constitute a felony violation of § 18.2-248;
- ii. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care neglects or refuses to provide care necessary for his health. However, no child who in good faith is under treatment solely by spiritual means through prayer in accordance with the tenets and practices of a recognized church or religious denomination shall for that reason alone be considered to be an abused or neglected child;
- iii. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care abandons such child;
- iv. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care commits or allows to be committed any act of sexual exploitation or any sexual act upon a child in violation of the law;
- v. Who is without parental care or guardianship caused by the unreasonable absence or the mental or physical incapacity of the child's parent, guardian, legal custodian or other person standing in loco parentis; or
- vi. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care creates a substantial risk of physical or mental injury by knowingly leaving the child alone in the same dwelling, including an apartment as defined in § 55-79.2, with a person to whom the child is not related by blood or marriage and who the parent or other person responsible for his care knows has been convicted of an offense against a minor for which registration is required as a violent sexual offender pursuant to § 9.1-902.

An act of child abuse may be committed by any person responsible for the care of another individual who is less than eighteen years of age. It does not matter whether the person caring for the child under the age of 18 (hereinafter referred to as a "Child" or "Children", which term as used in this Policy also includes youth ages 12-18) is a compensated or a volunteer worker. It does not matter whether the person routinely is entrusted with the care of children or whether such individual only occasionally comes in contact with children. It does not matter whether the person was entrusted with the care of a child for an hour or only a moment. It only matters that a child was abused or neglected by the person who, on the occasion in question, was responsible for the child's care.

Section 63.2-1509 of the Code of Virginia states that "...any teacher or other person employed in a public or private school, kindergarten, or nursery school, any person providing full-time or part-time child care for pay on a regular planned basis, ... and any person 18 years of age or older associated with or employed by any private organization responsible for the care, custody or control of children who has reason to suspect that a child is abused or neglected shall report the matter immediately...to the local Department of Social Services of the county or city wherein the child resides or wherein the abuse or neglect is believed to have occurred or to the Department of Social Services' toll-free child abuse and neglect hotline."

Everyone should report any known or reasonably suspected child abuse immediately. Any report is confidential and the person making the report is immune from liability for making such a report, unless it is proven that such a person acted in bad faith or with malicious intent.

VI. Types of Child Abuse

Child abuse refers to an act committed by a parent, care giver or person in a position of trust (even though he/she may not care for the child on a daily basis) which is not accidental and which harms or threatens to harm a child's physical or mental health or welfare. The following definitions and explanations in this section are from the Virginia Department of Social Services.

1. Physical Abuse

A physical injury, threat of injury or creation of a real and significant danger of substantial risk of death, disfigurement or impairment of bodily functions. Such injury or threat of injury, regardless of intent, is inflicted or allowed to be inflicted by non-accidental means. Examples: asphyxiation; bone fracture; brain damage, skull fracture, subdural hematoma; burns, scalding; cuts, bruises, welts, abrasion; internal injuries, poisoning; sprains, dislocations; gunshot, stabbing wounds.

2. Physical Neglect

The failure to provide food, clothing, shelter, or supervision for a child if the child's health or safety is endangered. Physical neglect may include multiple occurrences or a one-time critical or severe event that results in a threat to health or safety, such as a toddler left alone. Other types of neglect include abandonment, inadequate supervision, inadequate clothing, inadequate shelter, inadequate personal hygiene, inadequate food and malnutrition.

3. Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse includes any act defined in the code of Virginia which is committed, or allowed to be committed, upon a child by his/her parent or other persons responsible for the child's care. This includes but is not limited to social media platforms. Examples of such abuse are: sexual exploitation, sexual molestation, intercourse/sodomy and other sexual abuse.

4. Medical Neglect

Refusal or failure by caretaker to obtain and/or follow through with a complete regimen of medical, mental or dental care for a condition, which if untreated, could result in illness or developmental delays.

5. Failure to Thrive

A syndrome of infancy or early childhood which is characterized by growth failure, signs of severe malnutrition, and variable degrees of developmental retardation. Children are considered to be in this category only when the syndrome is diagnosed by a physician and is caused by non-organic factors.

6. Mental or Emotional Abuse/Neglect

A pattern of acts or omissions by the caretaker which result in harm to a child's psychological or emotional health or development. This includes but is not limited to social media or other online platforms.

7. Educational Neglect

The child's caretaker is directly responsible for the failure of the child to attend school or an approved alternative program of study.

8. Bizarre Discipline

Any actions in which the caretaker uses eccentric, irrational or grossly inappropriate procedures or devices to modify the child's behavior

VII. Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse

In an effort to create the safest possible environment within _____ Church, several abuse prevention measures will be utilized. These measures include screening of paid and volunteer workers for past child abuse convictions or expungements, provision for regular training on child abuse issues to paid and volunteer staff members, use of the Two Adult Rule, standards of appropriate classroom discipline, open classrooms and other policies as described below.

1. Two Adult (18 years or older) Rule

There shall be at least two volunteers in the classroom at all times. One must be an adult, age 18 or older. Youth, sixth grade and older, may be assistants.

Exception: There may be one teacher in a classroom with a group of children if there is an adult supervisor that checks in on the classroom regularly during the meeting time. Two youth may lead a class if one is in at least eleventh grade. In these cases, the door shall remain open unless it has a window.

The Head Usher or Elder on Duty will be present in the church building on Sundays from 9:00 am – 12:00 pm to act as a greeter, helper and assist with security as needed. This person will be stationed in the commons or the back of the sanctuary, but will roam to other areas during worship times.

At least one adult and one youth (16 years of age AND at least 3 years older than the children being supervised) will be present during all youth ministry activities.

No minor will be left unsupervised within the church grounds during church activities or programs. Preschool children should not be allowed to roam/move about church facilities unescorted.

Off-site Procedures: At least two unrelated adults shall supervise all groups of children and youth on off-site events except as noted below.

Exceptions: When transporting children and youth to events in private cars there may be one adult, with at least two children, in the car. The transportation policy (below) of the church will be followed. In addition, this two-adult rule does not apply in parent-child relationships or if written permission is given by a child's parent or guardian.

2. Classroom Discipline

All teachers and workers will use the following discipline measures. If a child is behaving inappropriately, the teacher or worker will tell the child specifically what he/she is doing that is not acceptable and state what the expected behavior is, e.g., "We do not throw the blocks. We use blocks for building." If this measure is not effective, the child will be guided to another activity. If inappropriate behavior continues, the child may be placed at a table to work alone away from the other students. If the child's disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, the child may be taken to the [Minister to Children or Minister to Youth or applicable role] who will then contact the child's parents. No physical punishment or verbal abuse is to be used at any time. If isolating the child within the classroom or removal of the child from the room becomes necessary, the situation will be discussed with the child's parents or guardian as soon as possible.

3. Open Classrooms

Classroom doors should be kept open at all times. If noise from the hallway is disrupting the class, the door maybe shut only if there is a non-blocked window in the classroom.

Classrooms or child care rooms may be visited without prior notice by church staff, parents, or other volunteer church workers. Brief observations of child care rooms and classrooms of children or youth may be conducted by the Pastor or [Minister to Children or Minister to Youth or applicable role] during any and all activities.

4. Transportation

When transporting participants to off-site activities, no automobile will contain only one adult (driver) and one child or youth. Automobiles will contain either one driver and two or more participants or two adults and any number of children or youth (within the seat belt limitations of the vehicle, whereas seatbelts are ALWAYS required).

One adult and one child or youth may travel together in an automobile given that written permission is obtained by a parent or legal guardian of the child or youth. In addition, it is understood that the adult driving the child must have undergone a background check including a motor vehicle record check.

Drivers must make use of child safety seats which meet federal standards is required for children under six (6) years of age. Drivers and passengers must also follow airbag age/weight regulations per specific vehicle guidelines.

Drivers for church-sponsored off campus events must be at least 18 years of age or older in order to conform to insurance policies. The driver must be familiar with the operation of the vehicle he/she is driving. Copies of the drivers driving record and driver's license and proof of insurance must be given to the person in charge of the event prior to being approved as a driver for the event.

Drivers must be at least the age of 25 if the distance of the event/activity is 60 miles or longer.

No consumption of alcohol or use of other drugs at any time by a driver or passenger while traveling to, from, or during a conference sponsored event (unless medication is medically necessary for the health and safety of the driver and/or passenger). Driver of the vehicle should refrain from cell phone use while driving.

5. Child Care

If child care is provided within the church facility during a church-sponsored function (i.e. dinner, Bible study, music rehearsal, etc), all child care providers must comply with our “Two Adult Rule”.

Workers supervising activities should arrive at the activity location at least 10 minutes before children are expected and remain at the activity site until all children have been picked up by the appropriate persons. Children must not be left alone waiting for a way home.

6. Overnight Activities

Special attention will be given to supervision during overnight and off-campus activities

- Two adult (male and female) advisors or parents should be present at all times during any co-ed activity.
- There should be at least one sex appropriate adult present in each room where child/youth are spending the night.
- All activities should begin and end at the church or at an agreed upon location.

7. One-on-One Mentoring or Consultation

Any one-on-one mentoring or consultation between an adult and a child will be conducted in a room or area that is in plain view of others.

VIII. Reporting Child Abuse

In the event that an individual involved in the care of children _____ Church becomes aware of suspected child abuse of a child under his/her care, this should be reported immediately to a member of the church staff or elder for further action including reporting to authorities as mandated by Virginia state law.

In the event that an incident of child abuse is alleged to have occurred at _____ Church or during our sponsored programs or activities, the church staff and/or session will utilize the following procedure:

1. The incident will be reported immediately to the state authorities (including the police and the Department of Children and Family Services), to the insurance company, to the church Session and to the Presbytery of the James.
2. The child’s parents will be notified and the child will be removed from the situation. We will not confront the accused until the safety of the child has been secured.
3. When the child is safe, the worker alleged to be the perpetrator of the child abuse will be removed from working with children pending an investigation. This individual will be handled with dignity and respect. If the accused is a paid employee of the church, he or she may be suspended until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.
4. An incident report (located in the children’s hallway near the computer station) will be filled out. All efforts will be documented on a daily basis.
5. We will cooperate with any investigation by the state or local authorities. In the event there is no investigation of the incident by state or local authorities, the Session will form a team to investigate the circumstances of the incident and to make recommendations, if any, to the Session. The team should act only in consultation with those assigned to us by our insurance company and the Session.
6. The role of the church is to provide spiritual care, comfort, and pastoral care for all parties, including the

victim, the alleged perpetrator and their families. The church staff will not act as a detective or investigator. Staff members should not prejudge the situation and should show care and support to all parties.

7. Public statements and media interviews will be handled under guidance of the attorney and through a Session-designated spokesperson. All other workers should refrain from speaking to the media.
8. If criminal charges are brought against the accused, an attorney appointed by the Session to represent the church will be engaged. Our insurance company and the denominational offices will also be informed of these charges.

IX. Check-in/Check-out Procedure

For children preschool and under, a security check-in/check-out procedure will be followed. The child will be signed in by a parent or guardian. A pager for the child will be made available, if needed. Should any need arise the parent or guardian will be promptly paged or retrieved by a nursery or preschool volunteer or staff. Only parents included on the child's registration form (completed at the beginning of the school year and updated as needed) may pick up the child. In the event that another individual is attempting to pick up the child the [Minister to Children or Minister to Youth or applicable role] will be contacted. She or he will be responsible for releasing the child, but only after speaking with and gaining explicit permission from the parent or guardian who signed the child in on that day.

X. Sick Child Policy

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all of the children at _____ Church. Parents are encouraged to be considerate of other children when deciding whether to place a child under our care. In general, children with the following symptoms should NOT be dropped off:

- Fever, diarrhea, or vomiting within the last 48 hours
- Green or yellow runny nose
- Eye or skin infections
- Other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease

Children who are observed by our workers to be ill will be separated from other children and the parent or guardian will be contacted to request that the child be picked up for the day.

XI. Medications Policy

It is the policy of _____ Church not to administer either prescription or non-prescription medications to the children under our care. Medications should be administered by a parent at home. Parents are reminded of our sick child policy.

Exceptions to the medications policy may be granted to parents of children with potentially life-threatening conditions (such as asthma or severe allergic reactions) or children with a medication regimen that intersects with church activities. Parents of such children should address their situation with [Minister to Children or Minister to Youth or applicable role] to develop a plan of action. In addition, non-prescription medications may be administered during church events with parental permission.

XII. Restroom Guidelines

Children five years of age and younger should utilize a classroom bathroom, if one is available. If a classroom bathroom is not available children five years of age and younger should utilize the following procedure.

Diaper should be changed by females only (unless it's a relative of the child) and should always be changed in view of another adult.

Preschool children should not be allowed to roam/move about church facilities unescorted.

Adult volunteer or staff should escort children to the bathroom, who will check the bathroom first to make sure that it is empty, then allow the children inside. The adult volunteer or staff will remain outside the bathroom door and then escort the children back to the classroom. If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, the adult volunteer or staff will open the bathroom door and call the child's name. If a child requires assistance, the adult volunteer or staff should prop open the bathroom door and leave the stall door open as he/she assists the child.

Children in grades K-5 will be allowed to go to the bathroom at designated times in the children's hallway, alone or in pairs.

For the protection of all, volunteers and staff should never be alone with a child in a bathroom with the door closed and never be in a closed bathroom stall with a child. Parents are strongly encouraged to have their children visit the bathroom prior to each class.

XIII. Accidental Injuries to Children

In the event that a child or youth is injured while under our care, the following steps should be followed:

1. For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, workers will provide first aid (Band-Aids, etc.) as appropriate and will notify the child's parent or guardian of the injury at the time the child is picked up from our care.
2. For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple first aid, the [Minister to Children or Minister to Youth or applicable role] and the parent and/or guardian will immediately be summoned in addition to the worker's supervisor. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.
3. Once the child has received appropriate medical attention, an incident report will be completed in the case of injuries requiring treatment by a medical professional. Incident reports are located in the children's hallway by the computer station.

XIV. Classroom Participant to Supervisor Ratios

Adequate supervision should be provided at all times with the goal being:

- One adult to 3 children, zero to twelve months of age, infants
- One adult to 4 children, twelve to twenty-four months of age, toddlers
- One adult to 6 children, twenty-four to thirty-six months of age, preschool
- One adult to 10 children, four to eleven years of age, elementary school
- One adult to 20 youth and vulnerable adults, eleven years of age to adult, middle & high school

The specific needs of individuals or physical limitations of event space may require a change to these guidelines.

XV. Sanitation

- Materials, toys, and furnishing soiled during use will be cleaned at the end of the session by the paid childcare giver.
- Gloves will be available for changing soiled diapers/clothing and when administering first aid.
- Hands will be washed after toilet use, diaper changing and before snacks. Antibacterial solutions may be used.

XVI. Physical Safety

- Paid childcare workers will check the room/facility for safety before use. Hazardous conditions will be removed, corrected or reported to [Minister to Youth or Minister to Children or applicable role] immediately.
- Adult caregivers will know the location of the first aid kits, emergency exits and telephone with emergency numbers. The caregivers will be instructed of these locations by the [Minister to Youth or Minister to Children or applicable role].

XVII. Training

_____ Church will provide training on this child protection policy to all new childcare workers and will strive to provide opportunities for additional training classes or events. All workers are strongly encouraged to attend these training events.

XVIII. Administration

- The Child/Youth Protection Policy must be approved by the Session.
- The Personnel Elder/Committee will review the policy annually and discuss any recommendations for changes with [Minister to Children or Minister to Youth or applicable role].
- Changes must be approved by the Session.
- The [Minister to Children or Minister to Youth or applicable role] will have a list of volunteers who have completed the background check and training which will be maintained in the church office and available for leaders in need of recruiting workers.

XIX. Social Media Guidelines

Social networking sites, texting, e-mailing and other forms of electronic communication are a reality in the lives of most of our students. They offer an opportunity to develop and deepen relationships in new ways and are therefore a vital part of youth/children's ministry work. But their improper use can produce serious consequences. The following recommended practices and guidelines apply commonly accepted principles of

healthy boundaries for digital networking and communication. Be mindful that our calling is to meet students/children where they are; model healthy boundaries; and love and care for them safely. Employee and children/youth leaders who want to communicate with minors using text messaging, email, social networking websites or other forms of electronic media should follow the guidelines listed below:

1. Leaders may not transmit any content that is illicit, unsavory, abusive, pornographic, discriminatory, harassing, or disrespectful when communicating with each other or with minors involved in ministry activities.
2. Except in an emergency, leaders may not transmit any personal information pertaining to a minor without the ministry participant and his or her parents or guardians signing consent forms. This applies to group texting, group e-mail, or any other public method of electronic communication. Personal information may include such things as a minor's name, phone number, e-mail address, or photograph.
3. Use prudent judgment in the time you contact minors through social media. The "home phone rule" is a basic rule of thumb to use – normally do not text, chat, or email back-and-forth with minors at a time you would not normally call their home phone line, i.e. before 8:00 AM or after 9:00 PM.
4. If a minor texts you after hours and it's not an emergency – wait until morning to reply
5. Leaders who become aware of possible child abuse through electronic media must immediately notify their supervisor. The ministry will consult with its attorney and report abuse as required by law.
6. If you choose to utilize any social networking site to communicate with minors associated with _____ Church youth/children's ministry, invite other _____ Church leaders to view and respond to the content.
7. Parents of minors should be aware of and how:
 - a. All information, images, or videos shared electronically through public ministry communications channels aren't considered confidential.
 - b. When possible, communication should be sent to entire groups, on their wall or in public areas - not in private messages – this includes images
 - c. When ongoing pastoral communications are private (i.e. emails, Facebook messages, texting, etc) – Who they are with and their frequency should be disclosed to the parent or a supervisor.
8. Any inappropriate material posted in your online groups should be deleted and addressed or reported if necessary.
9. Video communicating with minors is strongly discouraged – if you must, be aware of what you're wearing and of your surroundings.
10. Your emails and texts should communicate facts not feelings. When the content of a received email or text raises concerns or questions, share it with a member of the staff, Pastoral team, or supervisor.
 - a. Phone conversations and face-to-face meetings are the preferred mode of communication, when responding to emotionally driven communication or pastoral emergencies
11. There are further considerations when using photos and videos of minors for ministry purposes.
12. Respect the dignity of every person depicted in an image
13. Include a media release statement on a signed consent form
14. It is strongly discouraged to attach minor's names with their image (i.e. captions, tagging on Facebook, etc.)
15. If in doubt always remember, communicate in a manner that honors Christ and demonstrates His love for others. Our responsibility to lead the church by example as followers of Jesus and leaders at _____ Church includes the online realm of social media.

Acknowledgment of Children and Youth Protection Policy

This is to acknowledge that I have read and understand the Children and Youth Protection Policy of
 Presbyterian Church.

Printed Name

Date

Signature