

Child Protection Policy

I. Introduction

But Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs."
Matthew 19:14

As a caring Christian community, we at St. Paul's Christian Church (SPCC) are committed to providing a safe and nurturing environment for all children and for all those working with children.

The intention of this policy is to protect children from child abuse and to ensure that those working with children are not subjected to false or unwarranted charges of child abuse. For the purposes of this policy, the following definitions apply:

***Children or Youth** are any members or guests of St. Paul's Christian Church who are 18 and under. The **Chair(s) of the Christian Education Committee (CE Committee)** oversees the congregation's ministry for children and youth. Unpaid **Volunteers** are those who provide leadership to ministries for children and youth. Paid **Employees** are part-time or full-time workers employed by the congregation. **Ministers** refers to the Senior Minister and the Associate Minister. When appropriate, the minister may designate another staff person to fulfill the duties outlined for the minister in this policy. **Abuse** refers to physical, emotional, sexual, verbal, or ritual behaviors or neglect that cause or are likely to cause harm to a child.¹*

II. Standards of Conduct

Eligibility for Working with Children

The following guidelines will govern the eligibility of volunteers to work with children:

- Volunteers should be active participants in the congregation for at least six months before working with children.
- Volunteers should be 21 years of age or older to lead the high school youth. Volunteers should be 18 years of age or older to lead the middle school youth or younger children.

Exceptions to these guidelines will be made at the discretion of the ministers and/or the Chair of the Christian Education Committee.

¹ **Emotional abuse** conveys a message that the child is worthless and undeserving of love and care. **Sexual abuse** is any form of sexual contact between a child and an adult or older youth, and may include showing or talking about sexually explicit material. **Physical Abuse** is intentional, deliberate behavior that causes bodily harm to a child. **Neglect** is failing to meet a child's needs, such as nutritional, physical, emotional well being, education, and safety. Abuse and neglect are further defined in the North Carolina General Statute 7B-101 and 301.

Volunteer Screening and Training

Persons who indicate a desire or willingness to begin working with children and youth, who meet the eligibility requirements, shall meet with one of the ministers and/or the CE Committee Chair before beginning to work directly with children or youth. The meeting may be an informal meeting, or a formal training session. The meeting shall include review and discussion of the Child Protection Policy. New volunteers must sign the Child Protection Covenant, and complete a volunteer information form. Prior to beginning to work directly with children, prospective volunteers must also successfully complete a criminal background check.

All volunteers who work with children on an ongoing basis will review the protection policy annually, and sign the Child Protection Covenant each year. All volunteers must complete a criminal background check every five years. The cost of all background checks will be paid by SPCC. Any applicant who may pose a threat to children or youth will not be allowed to work directly with children or youth.

Employee Screening and Training

All employees (full-time and part-time) will undergo a criminal background check at the time of their hire (or upon approval of this policy, if already employed by SPCC), and shall review this Child Protection Policy and sign the Child Protection Covenant prior to beginning work.

All employees (full-time and part-time) shall confirm and re-sign the Child Protection Covenant annually, and undergo a criminal background check every five years. The cost of all background checks will be paid by SPCC.

First-Aid/CPR Training

Volunteers and employees are encouraged to complete First-Aid/CPR training. The Christian Education Team will periodically offer opportunities for such training.

Appropriate Caregiving

As a community of caring Christians, expressions of affection and affirmation are important in building life-giving relationships. Appropriate expressions of care include hugs; hand-holding (for example, in prayer time, or when moving a group of children from one place to another); lap-sitting for younger children; and pats on the shoulder, arm, or back. Physical care that provides for the well-being and safety of children, such as diaper changes, toileting, and first aid, are also appropriate. Care should be taken, however, that physical expressions of affection are not excessive or imposed on others. Volunteers should ask permission of a child before extending physical expressions of care (for example, "Can I give you a hug?" "Would you like to hold my hand?"). Physical expressions of affection should never be forced or imposed without permission.

Bathroom Policy

Adults who work with children are encouraged to send responsible children to the bathroom on their own, and should listen in case the child needs help. If a child needs to be accompanied to

the bathroom, only an adult with a background check may do so alone. Adults will wait outside the bathroom door for children while they are performing personal sanitary functions. When able, a child should take care of his or her own toileting and clothes after toileting. When a child needs help with his or her toileting or clothing, the adult(s) should leave the stall door open to assist with toileting and have the child step out of the stall and into an open area to assist with clothing. Any adult who accompanies a child to the bathroom should inform the other adult where they are going before they leave the room. When helping children to clean up from crafts and wash hands, the door to the bathroom should be left completely open. Diaper changes should be performed by nursery employees/volunteers only, or the parent of the child.

Appropriate Discipline

Appropriate discipline at any activity is important for the safety and well-being of our children. Communication between volunteers and the CE Committee Chair(s) and/or ministers is encouraged for any classroom management concerns. Employees and volunteers are encouraged to use the following graduated procedures to address inappropriate behaviors:

- If a child is behaving inappropriately, the employee or volunteer will tell the child specifically what he or she is doing that is not acceptable, and state what the expected behavior involves. For example, "We do not throw blocks. We use blocks for building," or, "We can't listen to the story if you are talking. Let's talk after we hear the story." If this approach 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's parent or guardian will be contacted to retrieve the child.
- No physical punishment or verbal abuse is to be used at any time.
- If a child is isolated within the classroom or removed from the classroom, the child's parents or guardian should be notified as soon as possible, so that the behaviors, the actions taken and next steps can be discussed.

Two-Adult Rule/Three-Person Rule

Two adults, 18 years of age or older, should be present at every activity involving children or youth. The practice is called the Two Adult Rule. When this is not possible or practical under the circumstances, an adult volunteer must always have at least two children present. This practice is called the "Three Person Rule." One adult and one child should never be alone under any circumstances.

If it appears that only one child will be present with one adult, the volunteer or employee shall: 1) find another volunteer/employee to join the activity, 2) join another youth activity, or 3) move to a visible common area. For example, if there is only 1 adult and 1 youth in the CYF Sunday School class, another adult can join the CYF class or the CYF class can join the Chi-Rho class. When possible, one of the ministers, the CE Committee Chair, or another appointed "floater" will move in and out of the classrooms providing additional supervision during all activities with children and youth.

In the event that having two adults is not possible or practical (e.g. driving one child/youth to or from Camp), the circumstances giving rise to the situation shall be discussed with parents or guardians prior to the event, and shall be undertaken only with the express written consent of the parent or guardian.

Parent-Child Exception

The terms of this Child Protection Policy do not apply to class discipline or the Two Adult/Three Person Rule if the adult volunteer is the parent of the minor child at issue.

Visual Access

To the maximum extent practicable, visual access shall be maintained for any room in which activities with children are being conducted.

Private Counseling

To the maximum extent practicable, any counseling with children or youth will be conducted in the presence of a second adult or in a visible public space. In no case shall an unaccompanied volunteer or employee meet with a single child unless there is at least one other employee or volunteer nearby who is aware that the private meeting is being held and the meeting location, or in an open area clearly visible to others. The identity of the child should remain confidential.

Electronic Communications Policy

Texting, e-mailing, and other forms of electronic communication have become common today, especially among students. Texting and electronic communication can be a vital part of youth ministry work, but their improper use can produce serious consequences. St. Paul's Christian Church desires to promote safety and to create a healthy environment for texting and electronic communication between ministers, employees, volunteers, and students who participate in ministry activities. As a result, St. Paul's Christian Church has developed the following guidelines:

1. Ministers, employees, and volunteers 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, adults may not transmit any personal information pertaining to a minor without the youth ministry participant and his or her parents or guardians signing consent forms. This applies to group texting, group email, or any other public method of electronic communication. Personal information may include such things as a minor's name, phone number, email address, or photograph.
3. Photographs and videos are sometimes taken of children and youth at church events and used in church publications and online. Parental/guardian permission must be obtained prior to publication of any photographs or video. Volunteers wishing to make public photos or videos of minor children should forward the photos to the Associate Minister for approval.

4. During ministry programs, youth leaders will discourage students from cell phone use that distracts from the program. Students are always permitted to contact parents or guardians, or make emergency phone calls.
5. Ministers, employees, and volunteers will instruct youth occasionally about the Youth Ministry Communications Policy and the dangers of sharing personal information online.
6. Ministry volunteers or employees who become aware of possible child abuse through electronic media must immediately notify one of the ministers immediately. The ministry will take immediate action, following the actions steps listed in Section 3 of this policy.
7. All information, images, or videos shared electronically through public ministry communications channels aren't considered confidential.
8. To participate in ministry electronic communications, youth must sign a related consent form.
9. Adults transporting children to/from youth activities are to avoid cell phone use anytime it violates local law, or compromises the safety of the passengers (i.e. while driving in heavy traffic, during hazardous weather conditions, etc).
10. Adults are never to send or read text messages when transporting children.

Outside Groups

Other faith groups and the Boy Scouts meeting at St. Paul's Christian Church will be provided with a copy of the Child Protection Policy. The groups will be encouraged to comply with these policies, and/or create their own to protect children and those working with children.

Communication with Parents

Parents/guardians will be asked to complete a registration form at the start of each school year, granting permission for children to participate in church activities and to communicate electronically with adult youth workers. Additional permission forms will be used for special events and outings. In the rare instance when activities involving children and youth are held without complying with these protection policies, parents will be notified ahead of time.

III. Responding to Allegations of Abuse

Specific Acts and Omissions in Violation of the Policy

The following acts or omissions are violations of this policy and will not be tolerated. Such acts or omissions are to be immediately reported to pastoral staff and could be grounds for immediate removal from the position. The safety of the child or youth involved is the first priority and will be assured as a first step:

1. Any direct observations or evidence of sexual activity in the presence of, or in association with a minor;
2. Any display or demonstration of sexual activity, abuse, insinuation of abuse, evidence of abusive conduct, or exploitation towards a minor;
3. Sexual advances towards or sexual activity of any kind with a minor;
4. Infliction of physically abusive behavior or bodily injury to a minor;

5. Physical neglect of a minor; including failure to provide adequate supervision in relation to the activities of St. Paul's Christian Church (SPCC);
6. Mental or emotional injury to a minor;
7. The presence or possession of obscene or pornographic materials at any SPCC function;
8. The presence, possession, or being under the influence of any illegal or illicit drugs; and
9. The consumption of or being under the influence of alcohol or marijuana while leading a function for minors at SPCC.

Reporting Incidents

St. Paul's Christian Church acknowledges that ministers are mandatory reporters, as are many of our congregants (in connection with their professional obligations). It is our expectation that reporting will take place consistent with the requirements outlined in North Carolina's General Statute 7B-301. In addition, the following procedures will be observed:

1. Any and all incidents involving questionable or inappropriate behavior related to possible sexual misconduct or sexual, physical, or verbal abuse shall be reported as soon as possible to one of the ministers. If one of the accused is a member of the Pastoral Team, the report should be made to a non-accused member (e.g., if the Senior Minister is accused, the report should be made to the Associate Minister).
2. The incident shall be documented in writing by the pastor who receives the report. The report shall contain the date, time, persons involved, and all known details related to the incident.
3. The ministers shall meet to discuss and implement an appropriate response and notify one or more members of the board as soon as possible. If one minister is unavailable and the discussion is urgent, a pastor may choose to meet with the board Chair or, in his or her absence, the Vice board Chair to discuss and implement an appropriate response.
4. If one of the ministers is involved in the accusation, the non-accused minister shall meet with the board Chair or, in his or her absence, the Vice board Chair.
5. If a report of misconduct against a minister is substantiated, the non-accused minister shall report this to the Regional Minister.

Response to Reports

The ministers at St. Paul's Christian Church shall treat every allegation of sexual abuse, misconduct, and inappropriate behavior very seriously. When questionable or inappropriate behavior is observed by any adult witnessing the behavior, they should contact a minister immediately. One of the ministers will notify the parent(s) or guardian(s) immediately and take any necessary steps to ensure the safety of the victim. The safety of the victim is the highest priority. Thereafter, the Ministers shall respond with the following as appropriate:

1. Immediately remove the accused abuser from further involvement with the children or youth. Do not confront the accused abuser with anger and hostility.
2. Filing a report immediately with the North Carolina Division of Social Services Child Protective Services/Wake County Department of Social Services: (919) 212 - 7990 and, if appropriate, the local police department.

3. Reach out to the Regional Minister or any other resources they might need in order to make an ethical and compassionate decision that favors the safety of our children (Current Regional Minister: Bishop Valerie Melvin, valerie@ncdisciples.org).
4. Keep a written record of the steps taken by the church in response to allegations of abuse.
5. Make any necessary statements or responses to the news media.
6. Consult with other church leaders and, as needed, call a response team together if they decide the situation merits one. Responses could include but are not limited to: preparing a brief and honest statement that can be made available to the congregation without giving unnecessary details, placing blame, interfering with the victim's privacy, or violating any confidentiality concerns.
7. Cooperate fully with the investigation conducted by law enforcement officials or North Carolina DHHS.

Additionally, the following responses shall occur, as appropriate:

1. The Senior Pastor shall notify and discuss all allegations with the church's legal counsel to ensure that all legal requirements are met in the response process. In the event that the accused is the Senior Minister, the Associate shall follow this course of action on behalf of the church.
2. When appropriate, the Senior Minister and/or board Chair shall notify SPCC's insurance carrier.
3. Such a response team, if called, shall be comprised of church leaders and members whose professional background would benefit the process. These leaders will be charged with keeping the situation confidential, ethical, and compassionate to all involved.

Response to the Accused Person

The alleged abuser is to be treated with dignity and support. The Senior Pastor in partnership with the church board shall have the authority to decide on the appropriate course of action in response to the Accused Person. This may include:

1. If the Accused is a volunteer he/she may be relieved temporarily of his/her duties until the allegations are cleared or substantiated. If the allegations are substantiated the accused may be dismissed from volunteer positions and, in extreme cases, disaffiliation from membership in this church. If the allegations are substantiated it may be appropriate to suspend the person's remote electronic access to Church systems, electronic records, email, social media accounts, or other official church computer platforms.
2. If the Accused is a staff member, his/her pay may be suspended and may be temporarily relieved of his/her duties until the allegations are cleared or substantiated. If the allegations are substantiated the accused may be dismissed from employment and volunteer positions and, in extreme cases, disaffiliation from membership in this church. If the allegations are substantiated it may be appropriate to suspend the person's remote electronic access to Church systems, electronic records, email, social media accounts, or other official church computer platforms.
3. If the Accused holds ministerial standing in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the information about the complaint and the church board's determination shall be given

to the North Carolina Regional Minister and Commission on Ministry. The church will cooperate fully in any procedures of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in determining the status of the Accused's ministerial standing with the denomination as a consequence of the misconduct.

4. If the Accused holds ministerial standing in another denomination, which the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) holds Full Communion with, the information about the complaint and the board's determination shall be given to the affiliated denomination. The church will cooperate fully in any procedures of the Accused's home denomination in determining the status of the Accused's ministerial standing as a consequence of the misconduct.

IV. Administration and Review

All volunteers, employees, and members of the congregation are expected to help ensure that these policies are followed. Any violation of these policies should be reported to the Chair of the Christian Education Committee and/or the ministers.

This policy will be reviewed every two years by the Chair of the Christian Education Committee and one of the ministers to ensure that the ministries of the congregation are in compliance with the policy. If it is determined that changes need to be made, a task force will be appointed to review the policy and take any changes to the church board for approval.

V. Additional Resources

Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church, by Joy Thornburg Melton (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2004).

North Carolina Division of Social Services Child Protective Services/Wake County Department of Social Services: (919) 212 - 7990

<http://www.wakegov.com/humanservices/children/Pages/default.aspx>

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