

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

Westminster Presbyterian Church

Charleston, SC

as amended January 2018

POLICY STATEMENT AND PURPOSE

As a caring Christian community, we at Westminster Presbyterian Church are committed to providing a safe and nurturing environment for all children and for all those working with children involved in the congregational life of Westminster Presbyterian Church (WPC) and its affiliated organizations. 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.

DEFINITIONS

For purposes of this policy, the following definitions shall apply:

Affiliated organization means a group, association, or entity that is either chartered by or sponsored by WPC, or that regularly utilizes WPC's facilities.

Child means any individual who is considered to be a minor under the laws of the State of South Carolina, including an individual who is legally incapacitated.

Child abuse includes the following:

- (1) The actual infliction, the threat to inflict or create, or permitting another to inflict or threaten to inflict or create a physical or mental injury upon a child, by other than accidental means, or the creation of a substantial risk of death, disfigurement, or impairment of bodily or mental function.
- (2) The refusal to provide care necessary to the health of a child, or the abandonment of a child, in one's care.
- (3) The commission or permitting of any act of sexual exploitation or any sexual act upon a child.

Child Protection Policy Review Team or CPP Review Team means a group of individuals appointed by the Session to administer this policy on behalf of the Session.

Employee means an individual who is hired or called to work for Westminster Presbyterian Church for salary or wages.

Member volunteer means a volunteer who:

- (1) has been a member of WPC for not less than 6 months, and
- (2) has been cleared by the CPP Review Team to work with children.

Provisional volunteer means a volunteer who:

- (1) is not a member of WPC, or**
- (2) has been a member of WPC for less than 6 months, or**
- (3) has not been cleared by the CPP Review Team to work with children.**

Supervision includes direct observation, control, and visual monitoring of activities.

Volunteer means an individual who provides services to WPC without monetary remuneration.

STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

No employee or volunteer shall engage in any act of child abuse.

No employee or volunteer shall touch, interact with, or otherwise communicate with a child in any way that is intended to be sexually stimulating, emotionally demeaning, or exploitative.

Common expressions of affection and affirmation (including hugs and pats on the back), or physical care (including diaper changes and first aid), are appropriate in this and any other community of caring Christians. Care must be taken, however, that physical expressions of affection are not excessive or imposed on another individual.

Employees and volunteers who work with children are tasked with guarding the physical and emotional safety of those in their care and with being alert for signs of each child's wellbeing.

No employee or volunteer shall use corporal punishment on a child during any program or activity conducted by WPC.

To the maximum extent practicable, there shall be visual access into each room in which activities with children are being conducted.

To the maximum extent practicable, employees and volunteers who work with children shall work in pairs, with two or more adults present with children at all activities. This may be accomplished via a window in a door so that monitoring is available. Under no circumstances shall an adult employee, volunteer or chaperone share a room with a solitary child in any overnight youth activity.

Each provisional volunteer who works with children shall work under the supervision of an employee or a member volunteer at all times.

If an unaccompanied employee or member volunteer meets with a single child to conduct a private discussion, that meeting shall be held at WPC when the church is open for activities, or shall be held in a public place. In no case shall an unaccompanied employee or volunteer meet with a single child at WPC unless there is at least one other employee, member volunteer, or the parent/guardian of the child in the building.

With respect to any church-sponsored activity for which WPC arranges transportation, one employee or member volunteer may transport children as long as there are two or more children in the vehicle, and providing all required vehicle and insurance information is on file with WPC. Children will be picked up and dropped off as a group at WPC or at other designated, central locations. Exceptions to this clause may be made in the case of medical or family emergencies, or with written permission of a parent or guardian and with written acknowledgement of responsibility by an employee or member volunteer. Privately arranged transportation is not addressed by this clause.

ALLEGATIONS OF CHILD ABUSE

Any individual who has a reasonable suspicion, or receiving a report of child abuse, shall promptly report the suspicion to the pastor, an associate pastor, or the clerk of session. If the alleged offender is an employee, the report shall be made to the clerk of session. If the individual is uncomfortable reporting to any of the above individuals, the report may be made to any active elder.

The pastor (or, in the absence of the pastor, the acting head of staff), or the clerk of session, as applicable, shall ensure that any credible allegation of child abuse is reported to the proper authorities in accordance with applicable state and local law. That report is to be made to Charleston County Department of Social Services (953-9422 or dial 211), not later than 72 hours after the suspicion is reported. By law, reports of child abuse are strictly confidential.

MANDATED REPORTING

Mandated reporting means that specific professions MUST, BY LAW, report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect.

Failure to report suspected child abuse or neglect can result in criminal liability (e.g., a criminal misdemeanor punishable by a fine and/or prison).

SOUTH CAROLINA CODE 20-7-510 lists certain professionals who are mandated reporters:

*Allied Health Professionals
Childcare or Daycare or Foster Care Facility Workers
Christian Science Practitioner
Clergy
Computer Technician
Counselor
Dentist
Emergency Medical Services Employees
Film Processor
Funeral Home Director/Employees
Judge
Medical Examiner or Coroner or Employees
Mental Health Professionals
Nurse
Optometrist
Physician
Police or Law Enforcement Officers
Principal and Assistant Principals
Public Assistance Workers
Religious Healer
School Teacher
Social Workers
Substance Abuse Treatment Staff and Employees*

The clerk of session or another person designated by the session also shall notify the Executive Presbyter and Stated Clerk of Charleston Atlantic Presbytery if an allegation is raised against an ordained minister, an employee or member of WPC.

In each case of alleged child abuse, the pastor (or, in the absence of the pastor, the acting head of staff) and/or the clerk of session or such other person(s) as designated by the session, shall contact and involve WPC's liability carrier and verify that Charleston County Department of Social Services has been notified and the proper written documentation of allegations and proceedings is maintained.

The pastor (or, in the absence of the pastor, the acting head of staff) and/or the clerk of session or such other person(s) as designated by the session, shall be responsible for maintaining contact with the police and with the family of each alleged victim and for determining further actions in consultation with the Session. Additionally, the pastor and/or the clerk of session or such other person(s) as designed by the session shall speak on behalf of the session in the event of an allegation that requires speaking to the congregation and/or the community.

WPC will cooperate fully with government authorities in the investigation of any suspicion of child abuse.

Any person whom allegations are brought against under this policy shall not work with any children during the investigation.

IMPLEMENTATION

A copy of this policy and the Child Protection Covenant shall be provided to each employee, families with children, and to each member volunteer participating in any program or activity involving children.

Each employee shall submit to WPC a signed copy of the Child Protection Covenant and shall submit to a background check as a condition of employment.

Each applicant for employment shall submit to WPC a signed copy of the Child Protection Covenant as part of his/her application for employment, and shall be willing to submit to a background check as a condition of employment.

An individual who seeks to be a member volunteer in any program or activity involving children shall submit to WPC a completed copy of the volunteer application and a signed copy of the Child Protection Covenant, and shall be willing to submit to a background check. An applicant may work as a provisional volunteer under the direct supervision of an employee or a member volunteer pending review of the application. A youth member volunteer shall be teamed with an employee or member.

In general, an application by an individual to volunteer in any program or activity involving children shall be accepted only after a minimum of 6 months of active membership by that individual at WPC. An exception may be made at the discretion of the Session, or a body authorized by the Session to allow for the short term involvement of an individual in an activity involving children (such as a service project, Vacation Bible School, Sunday morning childcare, etc.). In any such case, provisional volunteers and youth volunteers shall be teamed with an employee or a member volunteer.

Additionally, organizations affiliated with WPC (e.g. Girl Scout troops and Boy Scout troops chartered by WPC) shall provide a safe and nurturing environment for children and those working with children by following our policy, or submitting their policy for approval. Visiting organizations using our facilities shall provide a copy of their policy with their application for use of our facilities.

ADMINISTRATION

The CPP Review Team shall administer this policy.

All documentation associated with this policy (including applications, background checks, and documentation associated with allegations of child abuse or misconduct), shall be strictly confidential and shall be kept secure by the CPP Review Team.

The CPP Review Team shall be responsible for the conduct of appropriate clearances on employees, applicants for employment, and volunteers participating in programs or activities involving children.

The clearance process shall allow applicants the opportunity to correct or respond to information obtained from a background check. For purposes of the initial implementation of this policy, the CPP Review Team shall determine the manner in which initial clearances shall be conducted.

The CPP Review Team shall establish a schedule for conducting and updating clearances.

MEMBER AWARENESS

The congregation shall be informed of this policy upon its adoption by the Session and shall be reminded of this policy annually preferable during Child Abuse Prevention Month in April.

This policy, the Child Protection Covenant, and the volunteer application form, shall be provided in each new member packet.

Each employee and each member volunteer who works with children shall be required to review this policy and sign the Child Protection Covenant not less than annually.

A review of this policy shall be included in:

- (1) an annual Sunday school teacher training session**
- (2) training sessions for childcare, music, youth, vacation bible school, worship volunteers**
- (3) a training session for new elders and deacons.**
- (4) Session and Diaconate meetings annually***

A copy of this policy shall be posted in a central location at Westminster Presbyterian Church.