

Safe Church Policy for

[church name]

Approved by the Session on [date]

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Policy Statement

It is the intention of the members, session and staff of [church] to provide a safe and stable environment for all children, youth, and members of vulnerable populations entrusted to our care. A safe and stable environment includes a formal, written policy to help prevent the occurrence of abuse or neglect of children, youth, or members of vulnerable populations. Thus, the following policy and procedures are for the protection of our children, youth, members of vulnerable populations, employees, volunteers, and our entire community of faith at [church].

Application of Policy

This policy shall apply to all current and future workers, compensated and/or volunteer, who will have the responsibility of supervising the activities of children, youth, and members of vulnerable populations.

Definitions

For the purpose of this policy the following definitions shall apply:

1. **Child:** any individual under the age of twelve (12)
2. **Youth:** any individual who is twelve (12) to eighteen (18) years old or still in high school.
3. **Minor:** any child or youth 0-17 years old
4. **Adult:** any individual at least eighteen (18) years of age
5. **Worker:** any adult who serves as a volunteer and/or paid person given the responsibility of working with or caring for children, youth or members of vulnerable populations, whether on a regular ongoing basis, or intermittently as needed.
6. **Teen Worker:** any worker at least twelve (12) years old or older, but under the age of eighteen (18) enlisted to assist with the care of children
7. **Abuse:** verbal, physical, emotional, or sexual violation of a child, youth, or member of a vulnerable population
8. **Criminal Background Check (CBC):** the procedure used by a qualified agency to check the background of adult volunteers for criminal activity
9. **Members of vulnerable populations:** anyone who has difficulty speaking for themselves and/or is at a higher risk for experiencing verbal, physical, emotional, or sexual abuse due to a disability or mental illness

10. **Sexual misconduct:** comprehensive term used in this policy to include:

- a. **Child sexual abuse:** including, but not limited to, any contact or interaction between a child and an adult when the child is being used for the sexual stimulation of the adult person or of a third person. The behavior may or may not involve touching. Sexual behavior between a child and an adult is always considered forced whether or not consented to by the child. In the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the sexual abuse definition of a child is anyone under age eighteen.
- b. **Sexual abuse:** as defined in the *Book of Order*: “Sexual abuse of another person is any offense involving sexual conduct in relation to (1) any person under the age of eighteen years or anyone over the age of eighteen years without the mental capacity to consent; or (2) any person when the conduct includes force, threat, coercion, intimidation, or misuse of ordered ministry or position” (*Book of Order*, D-10.0401c).
- c. **Rape** or sexual contact by force, threat, or intimidation.
- d. **Misuse of technology:** use of technology that results in sexually harassing or abusing another person, including texting or emailing suggestive messages or images to persons with whom one has a ministerial relationship. It is never appropriate to view pornography or sexually explicit material on church property. When this includes a person under the age of eighteen, it is considered child abuse. There is never an expectation of personal privacy when using technological equipment owned by a church or church entity or within the context of ministry.

Worker Selection and Screening

1. All paid workers will be required to complete an interview process.
2. Whether a paid worker or a volunteer, each worker desiring to work with children, youth or members of vulnerable populations will also be required to complete a Code of Ethics and Application to Work with Minors and Members of Vulnerable Populations form.
3. For paid workers working with children, youth, or members of vulnerable populations, references from the interview process will be checked. For volunteers, the church member listed on the Application to Work with Minors and Members of Vulnerable Populations form will be contacted.
4. Any prospective worker who has prior incidents of perpetrating child sexual abuse, or any kind of abuse of children, youth, or member(s) of a vulnerable population should not be allowed to serve in any capacity where they would have contact with children, youth, or members of vulnerable populations.
5. Criminal background checks will be performed on applicants for paid positions after the applicant has signed the Background Investigation Consent Form, and within sixty days of being enlisted as a worker. Criminal background checks will be performed on these workers every three years, or as deemed necessary. (Only qualified representatives of the church will have access to the criminal background check report.)
6. Workers must be free of physical and psychological conditions that might adversely affect the health of children, youth, or members of vulnerable populations in their care, including contagious illness or disease.
7. A personnel file will be kept for each worker, which includes all applications and reference checks.
8. No volunteer will be allowed to work with children, youth, or members of vulnerable populations until they have been a member of the church or a regular attendee for a minimum of six (6) months.
9. At the applicant's request, the church shall allow the applicant to review their criminal history record transcript at the church, but in no event shall the church allow the applicant to retain and/or copy their transcript.
10. This policy applies to all workers who work with children, youth or members of vulnerable populations, whether on an on-going basis or intermittently as needed.
11. Teenage workers who serve in the children's ministry will be required to complete an Application for Teens Working with Minors or Members of Vulnerable Populations form and go through the worker training. The only step in the process they are exempt from is the criminal background check.

Worker Training

Each new worker will be given a copy of this policy. New workers will also be required to attend an annual training which familiarizes them with this policy. All workers must complete the training every three (3) years.

Acts and Omissions in Violation of This Policy

The following acts or omissions are violations of this policy and will not be tolerated or accepted during any program:

1. Sexual advances, sexual activity, sexual abuse, or insinuation of sexually abusive conduct with, in the presence of, or in association with a child, youth, or member of a vulnerable population.
2. Abusive conduct including infliction of bodily injury and/or mental or emotional injury to a child, youth, or member of a vulnerable population.
3. Physical neglect of a child, youth, or member of a vulnerable population, including failure to provide adequate supervision in relation to the activities of [church].
4. The presence or possession of pornographic materials at any function of [church].
5. The presence, possession, or being under the influence of any illegal or illicit drugs.
6. Being under the influence of controlled substances to the point of impairment while leading or participating in a function for children, youth, or members of vulnerable populations sponsored by [church].
7. Any person who directly observes or obtains evidence of any act which itself would be a violation of this policy and does not report such act.

Any person who directly observes or obtains evidence shall immediately report it to the designated program staff after the safety of the child, youth, or member of a vulnerable population involved has been assured.

Worker Supervision

1. The church, including all staff and volunteers, will adopt and endeavor to consistently maintain the “two adult rule,” which means at least two (2) adults must be present at all times in classes and other settings of children, youth, or members of a vulnerable population. Additionally, the church will strive to have at least one volunteer of each gender present. In those cases where only one (1) adult is providing care/leadership, any doors without windows must be left open at all times.
2. In any case where only one (1) adult is available to provide care or leadership, classes could be combined for more adult leadership or moved to a more public space.
3. The “two adult rule” applies in cases of transportation for church activities. Two adults are required to be in the vehicle transporting children, youth, or members of vulnerable populations from the church to the event location and back. A solo adult may transport children, youth, or members of vulnerable populations, with prior permission of parents or guardians.
4. At overnight events, parents or guardians of minors will be required to submit a list of medication(s) that their child(ren) take. If child(ren) are able to administer the medication(s) themselves, they may do so with the supervision of adult workers. If an adult must administer the medication(s), parents must provide specific instructions.
5. When accompanying children to the bathroom, workers should wait outside, or if the child needs assistance, leave the door ajar.
6. Church staff will supervise on an ongoing basis and make unannounced visits into classes or other programming from time to time.
7. In counseling sessions with minors, parental permission shall be obtained prior to a paid worker meeting privately with a minor, or the “two adult rule” shall be used in that instance. Prior permission may be granted by parents to cover a particular time period (i.e., a school year) for their child to receive counseling from a particular staff person.
8. Parental permission shall be obtained in advance for involvement in church sponsored programs. Permission forms may be obtained for an entire school year for regular programming such as Sunday School, Children’s Worship, and Youth Group.
9. Use a “check-in/check-out” procedure for all children age five and younger.
10. Orientation and training of volunteer workers will be conducted annually and will include an explanation of procedures to reduce the risk of abusive situations.

Guidelines for Working with Members of Vulnerable Populations (MVPs)

1. Workers will strive to create and maintain open channels of communication with MVPs and their parents/guardians.
 - a. An initial meeting will take place during which the staff person can assess with the parents/guardians any supports or accommodations needed for the MVP to fully participate in the life and ministry of the church.
 - b. Paid and volunteer workers who work with MVPs will, as necessary and in cooperation with their parents/guardians, communicate with other participants and their parents/guardians about the needs and gifts of MVPs.
 - c. Paid and volunteer workers who work with MVPs will continue to communicate with their parents/guardians regarding any needs, concerns, and progress that arise in the course of ministry.
2. Paid and volunteer workers will strive to offer supports and accommodations for MVPs as appropriate, including but not limited to:
 - a. The Buddy System: a parental or non-parental adult volunteer who is dedicated to attending to the needs of an MVP for the duration of a particular program.
 - b. Buddy Talks: a discussion with the MVP's peers, led by a staff person and/or the MVP's parents/guardians, that explains the differences an MVP experiences and educates the children on ways to be inclusive and kind.
 - c. Alternative options for activities that might prove challenging for an MVP who is participating in Sunday School, Children's Worship, or special events.
3. Staff will train all volunteers who work with MVPs in the guidelines of this policy and the specific needs and gifts of individuals with whom they work.
4. Youth MVPs are welcomed and encouraged to serve in the ministries of the church, including volunteering with children. Any Youth MVPs who serve in the children's ministries shall attend volunteer training, which may be modified to meet their needs as necessary. Adult workers who serve alongside Youth MVPs shall be made aware of their needs and gifts so as to work with them in a way that protects the dignity and safety of all individuals present.
5. If a safety issue arises due to the actions of an MVP, a staff person or volunteer will remove the vulnerable individual from the unsafe situation and immediately contact their parents/guardians.

Code of Ethics

While acting as a worker (paid or volunteer) with children, youth or members of vulnerable populations at [church], the following rules shall apply.

1. Smoking or using tobacco products of any kind in the presence of minors is prohibited.
2. Using, possessing, or being under the influence of alcohol, illegal, or illicit drugs will not be tolerated.
3. Workers shall not abuse anyone, including:
 - a. sexual advances, sexual activity, sexual abuse, or insinuation of sexually abusive conduct with, in the presence of, or in association with a child, youth or member of a vulnerable population
 - b. abusive conduct including infliction of bodily injury and/or mental or emotional injury to a child, youth, or member of a vulnerable population
 - c. physical neglect of a child, youth or member of a vulnerable population, including failure to provide adequate supervision in relation to the activities of [church]
 - d. the presence or possession of pornographic materials at any function of [church]
 - e. the presence, possession, or being under the influence of any illegal or illicit drugs
 - f. being under the influence of controlled substances to the point of impairment while leading or participating in a function for children, youth, or members of vulnerable populations at [church]
4. Workers must treat all people with respect, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, ability, class, gender, age, sexual orientation, and gender identity.
5. Workers shall not use profanity in the presence of children, youth, or members of vulnerable populations.
6. Workers will strive to be positive role models for children, youth, and members of vulnerable populations as they fulfill essential functions of their job.
7. Workers will strive to avoid being put in a situation in which they are alone with a child or youth (other than their own), or a member of vulnerable population.

Response Procedures

When a volunteer worker becomes aware of or reasonably believes that a potentially abusive incident has occurred, they should follow the procedures listed below:

1. Secure the immediate safety of the child.
2. Contact the Child Abuse Hotline at 877-237-0004 or in non-emergency situations, use the online form at <https://apps.tn.gov/carat>.

Reporting Procedures

Upon receiving notification of a suspected incident of abuse, the appropriate staff person should follow the procedures listed below:

1. The Department of Child Services (DCS) should be notified immediately.
2. All efforts in handling the incident, including conversations whether formal or informal, should be documented and kept on file.
3. The church insurer, attorney and appropriate denominational officials should be notified as deemed necessary.
4. When a child is involved, notify parents unless otherwise directed by DCS.
5. Public statements to the press or to the congregation regarding the incident should be made only from a prepared statement and only by the Head of Staff or his or her delegate. Safeguard the privacy of all involved.

Insurance

The church shall obtain a sufficient level of liability insurance coverage that would cover abuse and sexual misconduct claims. If available, the church should have the levels of coverage which are required for limited immunity.

Conclusion

[Church] must actively take steps to prevent abuse and be prepared to deal appropriately with accusations if they arise. Some may think that [church] is too small, or that in our church community everyone knows each other too well to be concerned with these problems. It is important to remember that abuse often happens in family contexts and is perpetrated by individuals known by the person abused. Silence about this issue harms potential victims. This is a difficult reality that the people of God must face.

Forms

Code of Ethics

I have been given a copy of the Safe Church Policy of [church] and am willing to abide by it. I understand that abuse of children, youth and members of vulnerable populations is a serious matter and I am willing to do my part in the prevention of abuse while serving at [church]. I understand that violation of this policy is ground for dismissal from my position.

Print Name _____ Date _

Applicant's Signature _____

Incident Report Form

Reason for report _

Date of incident _____ Class/Group _

Name of person submitting report _

Name(s) and Age(s) of Children, Youth or Member(s) of Vulnerable Populations involved

Briefly describe what happened (continue on back if necessary): _

What action did you take? _

Has the incident been resolved? [] Yes [] No Explain:

Has the parent/guardian been notified? [] Yes [] No

Names of witnesses, if any: _

Signatures of witnesses (if possible): _

Report submitted to: _

I have been given a copy of the Safe Church Policy and am willing to abide by it. I understand that abuse is a serious matter and I am willing to do my part in the prevention of abuse while serving at [church name].

Signature _____ Date _

Background Investigation Consent

I, _____ (applicant's complete name), hereby authorize [church name] to request Accufax, or another company, to release information regarding any record of charges or convictions contained in its files, or in any criminal file maintained on me, whether said file is a local, state, or national file, and including but not limited to accusations and convictions for crimes committed against minors, to the fullest extent permitted by state and federal law. I do release Accufax, or other company, from all liability that may result from any such disclosure made in response to this request.

Full Name (printed)

Signature

Date