

A CHILD SAFETY POLICY FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

For the Presbytery of Hudson River

Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes one child in my name welcomes me. Woe to the one who puts a stumbling block before one of these little ones."

(Matthew 18:4-5 paraphrased)

A Vision for Children and the Church Adopted by the 205th General Assembly, 1993

Because we affirm that all children are a gift of God, created by God and created good;

all children are a gift to the whole of the human community;

all children have a real faith, and gifts for ministry;

all children have the right to be children;

and all children are not just tomorrow, they are today.

Because we believe that all children depend upon adults for safety and security in a world that does not always value children;

all children are affected first and most deeply by those things that work against health and wholeness;

where there is disease, children sicken and die;

where there is homelessness, children sleep on the streets and in other dangerous places;

where there is war, children are frightened and without a safe place;

where air and water are polluted, children feel the effect in their bodies and in their futures;

where there is shame, children's spirits are wounded.

Therefore we hope for a world where all children can find a safe place;

where all ages, races, genders, creeds, and abilities are recognized, valued, and celebrated;

where all adults hear the voices of children and speak with as well as for them;

where all children have "first call" on the world's resources and first place in the minds and hearts of the world's adults.

Because Jesus welcomed children and encouraged us to welcome them in his name; Jesus lifted up a child as an example of what the realm of God is like;

Therefore we hope for a church where we take seriously our baptismal vow to nurture all children committed to our care;

where we bring good news to all those places where children are in need;

where adults and children alike share in ministry.

We covenant to act so that this vision may be made real for all children, now and in times to come.

I. DEFINITIONS

This, as provided by Social Services, requires that any action that results in physical or emotional abuse or that endangers children must be reported. This includes but is not limited to the abuses defined below.

A. Child: Any person under 18 years of age, or at-risk adults 18 and older who are particularly vulnerable due to limited mental function.

B. Child Abuse: Any treatment of a child that threatens the child's safety or leaves the child's life with physical or emotional scars. It may result from physical contact, sexual contact or improper communication by any adult with authority over a child. Abuse can also occur between two children. Any activity that is abusive is still abuse, even if a child cooperates out of ignorance, innocence or fear.

C. Sexual Abuse: Any sexual activity with a child - whether in the home by a caretaker, in a daycare situation, a foster/residential setting, or in any other setting. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent, or another child, provided the child is four years older than the victim. Sexual Abuse may be either touch (physical) or non-touch (verbal) by a person known or unknown to the child. For all sex offenses, a person is deemed legally incapable of consent if they are less than 17 years of age, mentally defective or incapacitated, or physically helpless.

D. Child Maltreatment: The responsible person is not providing minimal care for the child, with the result that the child's physical, mental or emotional condition has been impaired or is in danger of becoming impaired. This includes not providing adequate food, clothing, shelter, education or medical/dental care when financially able. It also includes excessive corporal punishment, or abandonment of the child, or loss of control of one's actions due to drugs or alcohol.

For the purposes of this policy, when the term "child abuse" is used it will include child abuse, sexual abuse, and child maltreatment as defined above.

II. RECEIVING AND REPORTING INFORMATION ABOUT CHILD ABUSE

A. Receiving Information about Child Abuse

Information about child abuse which comes to employees or other volunteers must be taken seriously. This includes but is not limited to the following:

- Reports by children of abuse to others
- Disclosure (direct or indirect) by the abused child
- Observations by individuals
- Conversations with other children or adults about potential abuse
- Evidence of possible abuse

B. Reporting Child Abuse

Presbytery employees, ordained officers (i.e.: Elders, Deacons), Trustees, and all volunteers working with children, are required to immediately report (within 24 hours) any situation where there is reasonable cause to suggest that a child may have been abused in any form.

1. If child abuse, sexual abuse, or maltreatment by anyone (staff, volunteer, ordained, or lay leader), is reported or suspected, the person making or receiving the complaint must report it immediately to the Stated Clerk of Presbytery and appropriate civil authorities (see #3 below).
2. If it is not possible for any reason to contact the Stated Clerk (e.g. s/he is unavailable) or the Stated Clerk is the accused, notify the General Presbyter. If that too is not possible, notify the Chair of COM.
3. Using the Incident Report Form (Form A attached) as a guide, the person making or receiving the complaint along with the Stated Clerk of Presbytery will contact the civil authorities together by calling the New York State Child Protection Hotline (1-800-342-3720; <http://ocfs.ny.gov/main/cps>). (The clerk and complainant together should first determine whether the complainant is a mandated reporter or voluntary reporter under New York State Law. <http://www.nysmandatedreporter.org>) Depending upon their location they will make the call together on speakerphone (available in church offices) or by using an extension telephone.
4. In addition, the Stated Clerk or other appropriate authority, i.e. General Presbyter or COM Chair, will report the action to the child's parent or guardian (providing this will not put the child in jeopardy for additional abuse) as well as the General Presbyter or chair of COM (if they were not the reporting body).

C. Consequences and Additional Action

1. When a child is in immediate danger, if possible, secure the safety of the child first.
2. The accused person, whether staff or volunteer, may not participate in any activities involving children and youth, until the investigation by civil and/or ecclesiastical authorities is completed and the accused is exonerated.
3. The identity of the accuser and the accused must be kept confidential. The report or the suspected incident may only be referred to and discussed with the authorized people listed above in B 2 through 4.

III. POLICIES FOR PRESBYTERY RUN PROGRAMS

A. Screening of Employees and Volunteers in Presbytery Programs

The Coordinating Team will assure itself that any person who serves as an employee or volunteer of children/youth is qualified to do so. This would include employees or volunteers who work with children at any presbytery sponsored event.

A volunteer must be a member of a congregation of the Presbytery of Hudson River, or have regularly attended that congregation, for six months before working with youth or children. This requirement does not apply to employees or volunteers involved in activities in which their own children are present. COM shall have the authority to waive this six-month rule upon request, where appropriate.

1. It is required that employees or volunteers sign a Sexual Misconduct Information Form (Form B- attached). We also suggest that they undergo a basic background check.
2. Any person who is known to have been convicted of, pled guilty to or no contest to, or is presently under indictment for a crime against children or youth or for sexual misconduct of any kind will not be placed in a position involving access to children or youth. Please refer to the New York State Sex Offender Registry (<http://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/nsor/>).
3. The Stated Clerk reserves the right to clarify any information or concerns through interview or further screening. The Stated Clerk may limit access of any individual to children/youth at any time in the interest of safety.
4. Employees or volunteers working with children are required to receive training in the child protection policy and the *Darkness to Light: Stewards of Children* abuse prevention program (<http://www.d2l.org>) or an equivalent program, prior to working with children, and to renew that training at least once every three years.

B. Requirements of Parents of Children in Presbytery Activities

1. Parents must advise the employee or volunteer if it is necessary for a child to leave before the scheduled end of an event.
2. Any time a child or youth participates in an overnight event at the church or elsewhere, parents are required to sign a permission slip.

3. Parents are responsible for all transportation of children and youth to presbytery events, unless otherwise arranged by the church.
4. It is the responsibility of parents to supervise their children at presbytery events when the children are not participating in a presbytery-related activity.

IV. SUPERVISION OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

1. Employees or volunteers will not allow children through first grade to leave the event, however temporarily, unaccompanied.
2. Employees or volunteers will not dismiss any child/youth before the scheduled end of an event without permission. If, for any reasons, a child needs to leave a program without prior permission, a parent or authorized guardian will be contacted and advised.
3. Every effort will be made to have at least two adults present for all activities involving children and youth, at least one of whom will be over 18 years of age and at least five years older than those whom they are supervising.
4. Rooms and areas used for activities for children and youth shall be made as visible as possible. Wherever possible, doors shall have an unobstructed viewing window. Where there is no window in the door, the door shall be left open.
5. When children or youth attend overnight events, they must be accompanied by at least two trained leaders, both of whom are at least 21 years of age and at least five years older than those whom they are supervising.
6. Any injury, action, illness or mishap that takes place while a child or youth is under the supervision of an employee or volunteer, must be reported by the employee or volunteer to the presbytery office within 24 hours of the incident.
7. Ratios: The recommended adult/volunteer-to-child/youth ratio, based on best practices, is 1:6, gender balance is recommended. For overnight trips, the ratio is 1:4, although 1:6 is permissible.
8. Restroom Guidelines
Children five years of age and younger should use a bathroom in the same room, if one is available. If one is not available, employees or volunteers should escort a group of at least two children to the hallway

bathroom. They should always go in a group, never taking a child to the bathroom alone. The employee or volunteer should check the bathroom first to make sure that it is empty, and then allow the children inside. The employee or volunteer should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children back to the room. If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, the worker should open the bathroom door and call the child's name. If a child requires assistance, the workers should prop open the bathroom door, and leave the stall door open as they assist the child. For children over the age of five, at least one adult male should take boys to the restroom and at least one adult female should take girls. The employee or volunteer should check the bathroom first to make sure that the bathroom is empty, and then allow the children inside. The employee or volunteer should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children back to the room. For the protection of all, employees or volunteers 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 being dropped off for an event.

POLICY REVIEW

The provisions of this policy shall be reviewed annually by the Boundary Team. Any proposed changes to the policy will be brought to the attention of the Coordinating Team for its input, if any, prior to any such changes becoming final. The Boundary Team shall report periodically to the presbytery and recommend any changes deemed appropriate.

Adopted by the Presbytery of Hudson River 16 July 2016

1. Name of employee or volunteer observing or receiving disclosure of child abuse:
2. Child's Name/Address/Telephone
3. Child's Age/Date of Birth:
4. Date/place of initial conversation with/or report of child:
5. Child's statement (give your detailed summary here or on back of this page):
6. Name/Address/Telephone of person accused:
7. Relationship of accused to child (employee, volunteer, family member, other:
8. Name/Address/Telephone of witness(es), if any, to the incident:
9. Reported to either Stated Clerk, General Presbyter, or Chair of COM (give name):
 - Date/Time of Report:
 - Summary of Report:
10. Call to child's parent/guardian
 - Date/Time:
 - Spoke with:
 - Summary of conversation:
11. Date/Time/Name of person reported to:
 - Stated Clerk: 914-941-2100
 - Child Protective Services (800-342-3720)
 - General Presbyter (914) 941-2100

Form B

Presbytery of Hudson River
Sexual Misconduct Information Sheet

Name (please print):

ALL INFORMATION PROVIDED ON THIS FORM WILL BE KEPT ENTIRELY
CONFIDENTIAL.

Please initial

_____ I certify by signature below that I have never been convicted of, or pleaded guilty to, any crime related to child abuse or sexual misconduct, and that no such charges are presently filed against me.

_____ If I am unable to make the above certification, I offer the following information or explanation:

_____ I authorize Presbytery of Hudson River to inquire concerning any civil or criminal records, or any judicial or ecclesiastical proceeding involving me as a defendant, related to child abuse or sexual misconduct. I also authorize those contacted to release any and all requested relevant information to Presbytery of Hudson River.

For this reason, please provide your date of birth: _Mo/Day/Year and Social Security No.

_____ I understand that information obtained in this manner may be used to deny my acceptance as an employee or volunteer of children, youth or adults in the Presbytery of Hudson River. And, I hereby release the presbytery from any and all claims, liabilities and cause of action for the release of any information related to child abuse or sexual misconduct.

The above information is accurate to the best of my knowledge.

Signature: _____

Date: _____