

SUFFERN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY (rev. 10/05)

OBJECTIVES

This policy is based on Matthew 18:1-10 in which Jesus is very clear that no one should harm children and woe to anyone who does. This policy was adopted in order to:

A. Protect the Children

Children (and parents) need to know that kids in our church are well cared for in a safe and secure environment.

B. Protect the Adults

By the completion of character and background checks and the establishment of appropriate guidelines and boundaries, we may be in a better position to ward off false accusations.

C. Support Ministry

The completion of the CPP process enables our children and youth ministries to have a high level of trust in each volunteer, which permits the volunteers to focus on their calling from God and permits the church's leadership to put boundaries in place to insure safety for children.

D. Protect the Church

God calls us to be good stewards of the resources that He has given us. We believe that God is asking us to use His resources to continue and expand our current ministries and to create new ministries so that we can disciple our children and youth and also reach even more lost people to bring them to know Christ.

UNDERSTANDING THE ISSUES

A. Understanding Why Churches Are Sued

1. Negligence in screening and training workers
2. Negligence in event planning
3. Negligence in emergency action
4. Negligence in supervision
5. Negligence in communication

B. Understanding the Need

1. Church leaders are responsible for providing a safe and secure environment for their ministries including recruiting and training volunteers, providing proper supervision, and maintaining safe facilities that meet the needs of individuals at every age level.
2. More than 1 million children are victims of abuse and neglect annually in the U.S.
3. 1 in 3 girls and 1 in 5 boys are abused by age 18.
4. 38% of girls are sexually abused by age 18.

C. Understanding Child Abuse

1. Definition of Child Abuse: Non-accidental physical or mental injury or mistreatment caused by the acts or omissions of the child's parents or caretakers.
2. Four Categories of Abuse
 - a. Physical – non-accidental injury
 - b. Emotional – chronic attitudes or acts that are likely to produce serious long-term emotional disorders
 - c. Verbal – communication by words, vocal tone, and accompanying body language that demean a person's appearance or worth (derogatory name-calling, criticism, yelling)
 - d. Sexual – sexual exploitation of a child whether consensual or not
3. Neglect
 - a. Emotional – failure to provide the praise, love, nurture, and security essential to the psychological and social development of a child
 - b. Physical – failure to meet basic requirements for supervision, housing, clothing, medical attention, and nutrition
4. Adults, Elderly and People with Disabilities

Many abuse issues may also pertain to adults and people with disabilities, even between consenting adults. Even if individuals are consenting, issues of abuse may be raised due to the power of position (i.e., spiritual leader or minister).

D. Understanding the Church's Responsibility

1. Scriptural and Moral Responsibility
 - a. I Thessalonians 5:22 – Avoid every kind of evil.
 - b. Ephesians 5:3 -- But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.
 - c. Matthew 18:6 -- But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.
 - d. Galatians 6:1-2 -- Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.
 - e. Matthew 19:14 – Jesus said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”
 - f. James 3:1 -- Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.
 - g. Hebrews 13:7 – Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.
2. Civil and Legal Liability
 - a. A church and its personnel may be held accountable for the actions of individual abusers in that church even when they were not aware of the abuse nor would the abuse have been condoned.
 - b. Churches have been sued alleging that a particular church was vicariously liable for the acts of its personnel and volunteers whether or not the church was aware of the abuse.
 - c. Churches have been alleged to be negligent in hiring and accepting personnel whether paid or volunteer.

RECRUITING MINISTRY VOLUNTEERS

A. Qualifications of Volunteers and Paid Staff in Child Care, Children's and Youth Programs

1. Our programs for children and youth could not succeed without the commitment of dedicated and caring volunteers and paid staff. To ensure continued success, adult volunteers and paid workers in our children's, youth, and child care programs should be persons who are committed to the spiritual development of our preschoolers, children, and youth and be at least 16 years old (or may be in senior high if approved by the Junior Church Coordinator). Youth Aides must be at least in sixth grade.
2. A volunteer in our children's and youth programs is required to be a member of Suffern Presbyterian Church or working toward membership. A volunteer is to have regularly attended SPC for a minimum of six months prior to supervising children's or youth programs or to have attended for three months prior to assisting in such programs.
3. Persons who have been convicted of any offense involving sexual or physical abuse may not serve as volunteers in ministry or paid staff.

B. Committee/Board Approval

1. The recruiting process is established and approved by Session.
2. Screening of potential volunteers: candidates must fill out a Volunteer Application (see appendix).
3. References will be checked by the pastor(s) or a committee of Session.
4. Both criminal and child abuse background checks will be run on all candidates, whether volunteers or paid staff.
5. A follow-up interview will be conducted with all volunteer candidates by the pastor(s) or a committee of Session.
6. Records are to be kept by the Clerk of Session.
7. All paid staff must be approved by Session.

C. Volunteer Application (see appendix)

1. Must be completed for all positions involving ministry, teaching, or care.
2. Must contain personal, spiritual, and health-related information
3. Records must be retained in a confidential location by the Clerk of Session for 5 years after an individual has left a ministry position.

CREATING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

The information in this section pertains primarily to SPC's children's and youth programs. However, the same precautions addressed under the headings regarding one-on-one meetings (see section A-2) and transportation (see G-2) also pertain to adult programs.

A. Staffing and Supervising

1. Two-Person Rule with Children
 - a. If at all possible, two supervisory individuals should be present in a room at all times. This may mean one adult and one youth aide.
 - b. Each classroom is to have doors with window panels. Dutch doors serving as the nursery's main entrance and in between the nursery and Junior Church classrooms are to have the top half kept open on those occasions when only one supervisory individual is able to be present in each room.
2. One-on-One Meetings with Youth

When a leader and youth are meeting one-on-one, whenever possible both individuals should be of the same gender, otherwise the meeting should occur in a public place.
3. Teacher/Student Ratios
 - a. One (1) caregiver for 3 infants
 - b. One (1) caregiver for 4 toddlers or preschoolers
 - c. One (1) caregiver for 8-10 elementary school age children
 - d. One (1) caregiver for 15 youth
4. Volunteer Age
 - a. Primary caregiver to be 16 years or older (or may be in senior high if approved by the Junior Church Coordinator)
 - b. Youth aide to be in 6th grade or above
5. Supervision
 - a. Weekly: Janitorial staff to check and clean rooms
 - b. Semi-annually: Facilities to be checked by staff
 - c. Children's Committee:
Responsible for seeing that volunteers are trained in the Child Protection Policy annually in the fall, or as needed.
 - d. Sunday School teachers:
Responsible for checking classes weekly.

B. Early Childhood/Elementary Considerations

1. Volunteer Identification

All volunteers are to wear nametags.
2. Child Registration
 - a. A Registration Form (see appendix) is to be filled out annually for each child by their parent.
 - b. Infants and toddlers must be signed in by their parent or guardian at the nursery door each week.
 - c. Whenever possible it is preferable for a parent or guardian to pick up their own child from Junior Church and/or child care.
3. Volunteer Registration

Each week volunteers and staff must sign in and out (recording the times of day).
4. Diaper Changing
 - a. The diaper changing procedure should be followed at all times (see appendix).
 - b. Only female volunteers or paid child care workers may change a child's diaper.
5. Restroom Guidelines
 - a. Children should be escorted to the restroom at the beginning of Junior Church.
 - b. Only female volunteers are to escort children to the restroom.
 - c. Volunteers are to remain outside the restroom door, propping the door open if necessary.
 - d. Volunteers are not to be alone in a restroom cubicle with a child.
6. Clean Hands

All volunteers and paid child care workers must wash their hands with soap and water after using the restroom facilities and also before serving snacks.

Creating a Safe Environment (cont'd.)

C. Health and Safety Guidelines

1. Well Child Policy
 - a. If a child appears to be ill, they should not be allowed to remain in the nursery or classroom, but should be returned to the parent for an explanation.
 - b. Each fall, the church's "Well Child Policy" will be provided to parents which states, "For the health and safety of all the children, we ask that children not be brought to the 2nd floor Children's Ministry Center if they have had any of the following symptoms within the past 24 hours: fever above 99°, vomiting, diarrhea, contagious rash, or any other communicable illness."
2. Medications
 - a. Volunteers may not dispense any medications during regular church functions.
 - b. For retreats or special event trips taken off church property, the child's parent or guardian must give written permission for an adult volunteer to administer a medication. The medication is to be provided in its original package with the child's name on it.
3. Emergencies

Routes of escape are to be posted in each classroom.

D. Policy for Responding to an Injury or Illness

1. Separate injured or ill children from other children.
2. Isolate the area where bodily fluids or blood may have dropped.
3. Wear vinyl gloves to clean up the area.
4. Be certain the area is cleaned and disinfected.
5. Leave a note in the sexton's mailbox with instructions about additional clean up required.
6. Place all soiled items in a plastic bag or the diaper pail and dispose of properly.
7. Wash hands thoroughly.

E. Housekeeping

1. Nursery/Classrooms

Each group using the rooms must clean up after themselves.
2. Janitorial Cleaning
 - a. The sexton must clean all tabletops, changing tables and cribs weekly.
 - b. Each classroom should be cleaned weekly and special cleaning should be done as necessary.

F. Policy for the Proper Display of Affection

1. Appropriate Touch
 - a. Meet children at their eye level by bending down or sitting.
 - b. Listen to individuals with your eyes, ears, and heart.
 - c. Hold a child's hand.
 - d. Give a hug in public only.
 - e. A light touch may be given to a hand, shoulder, or back for encouragement.
 - f. Gently hold the shoulders or chin of a child to redirect their focus.
 - g. Hold a crying child.
2. Inappropriate Touch
 - a. Physical affection is never to be given in a non-public area.
 - b. Never touch a child in any area that would be covered by a bathing suit.
 - c. Never administer corporal punishment.

Creating a Safe Environment (cont'd.)

G. Special Events, Multi-Church Events, and Overnight Policies

1. Field Trips and Special Events
 - a. All special activities must be reported to the Clerk of Session using a Church Activity Report (appendix).
 - b. A completed Parental Consent and Medical Release Form (appendix) is required for each child/youth participating.
 - c. Two leaders are to supervise all children's activities.
2. Transportation
 - a. All drivers for church-related activities must be at least 21 years old, have a valid driver's license, and up-to-date automobile insurance.
 - b. Vehicle occupants must not exceed the number of available seatbelts.
 - c. All passengers are to wear seatbelts.
 - d. If at all possible, a leader and child/youth of the opposite sex should not be alone in a vehicle.
3. Multi-Church Events on SPC property (i.e., Vacation Bible School)
 - a. All adult volunteer candidates from the community must complete SPC's Community Volunteer Application (appendix).
 - b. The application must be accompanied by a letter of recommendation from the candidate's pastor on their church's letterhead.
4. Overnight Events
 - a. Must be approved by the pastor(s) and reported to the Session.
 - b. All participants must provide a completed Parental Consent and Medical Release Form, which the leader is to have at all times.
 - c. Any supervising adults must be approved volunteers.
 - d. Supervising ratios: 1 adult per 5 children; 1 adult per 8 youth.

H. Discipline Policy

1. Reward good behavior immediately. Praise and encouragement generally produces positive results.
2. Remind the students of proper classroom behavior which should be posted in each classroom:
 - a. Be kind to one another.
 - b. Show respect by paying attention and listening.
 - c. Follow instructions.
 - d. One person is to talk at a time.
 - e. Keep hands and feet to yourself.
3. Redirect the student who has difficulty behaving properly.
4. Remove a misbehaving student from the group using a time-out chair in the room, or have them sit alone. When the child has settled down, have them rejoin the group.
5. Return the student to their parent or guardian if after three warnings the student is unable to change their behavior or if they repeatedly exhibit the same disruptive behavior.

I. Internet Access

1. All computers on the church premises are to have child protection filters.
2. These filters are to insure that inappropriate material, including pornographic images and text, cannot be viewed by any person while on the church premises.

REPORTING PROCEDURES

A. Basic Principals for Reporting Abuse

1. All allegations need to be taken seriously.
2. Situations must be handled forthrightly, with due respect for an individual's privacy and confidentiality.
3. Full cooperation must be given to civil and law enforcement authorities under the guidance of the church's lawyer.
4. Appropriate care must be shown for the well-being of alleged victims and they should not be held responsible in any way.

B. Response Plan

1. Maintain adequate records
 - a. The Clerk of Session is responsible for filing volunteer and staff applications.
 - b. Records are to be kept up-to-date by renewing applications annually.
 - c. Records are to be retained for 5 years after a volunteer or paid staff person has left a ministry position.
2. Clerk of Session is the church's spokesperson.
3. Should an allegation occur:
 - a. Report it to the pastor(s) or Clerk of Session immediately.
 - b. A lawyer is to be retained by the church while investigating an abuse allegation.
 - c. The pastor(s) or Clerk of Session is to verbally report the incident to the appropriate civil and/or law enforcement authorities and is then required to submit a written report to the same authorities within 5 days.
 - i. Child Abuse and Maltreatment Reporting Center (800-342-3720)
 - ii. Suffern Police Department (845-357-2300)
 - iii. Rockland County Sheriff's Department (845-638-5400)
 - d. The church's insurance agent is to be contacted immediately.
 - e. If a church worker is accused, that person should be temporarily relieved of duties (with pay, if applicable) until the investigation is completed.
 - f. If a member of the ordained pastoral staff is accused, then the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of Hudson River must be informed and an investigative process will be undertaken according to the directives of the Presbytery's Sexual Misconduct Policy.
 - f. A Suspected Abuse Report form (appendix) is to be completed and submitted to the pastor(s).
 - g. Follow-up the allegation and complete a Suspected Abuse Follow-up Report form (appendix).
 - h. All policies of the church's insurance and denomination are to be strictly adhered to.
4. Position Statement that can be released should an allegation of abuse occur:

It is always tragic when children are abused or exploited. Suffern Presbyterian Church is aware of the ever-growing nature of child abuse and the harm that is done to the victims. We have taken every precaution to protect the children entrusted to our care. Our paid staff and volunteers are carefully screened before beginning ministry in our church. Training occurs to inform our ministry staff about the various policies implemented to provide for the safety of our children. We have also reviewed with our staff what to watch for and how to report any suspicious behavior relating to the abuse of children. We are distressed by any accusation of child abuse. We will do everything in our power to address this situation. For the welfare of those involved, all information has been directed to the Child Abuse and Maltreatment Center.

C. Obligation to Report

1. Who Must Report – Anyone who suspects child abuse must contact the pastor(s).
2. What to Report
 - a. Unexplained bruises, burns, fractures or abrasions (often in various stages of healing)
 - b. Consistent lack of supervision
 - c. Consistent hunger, inappropriate dress, poor hygiene or unattended medical needs
 - d. Extremes of aggression or withdrawal
 - e. Moves with discomfort and shies away from physical contact
 - f. Wearing clothing inappropriate for the weather in order to cover body
 - g. Withdrawn, depressed, listless
 - h. Torn, stained or bloody underwear
 - i. Irritation of the mouth, genital or anal area
 - j. Difficulty sitting or walking
 - k. Inappropriate sex play, acting out seductiveness or promiscuity
 - l. Sudden changes in school performance, appetite or perceived self-worth
3. Confidentiality Issue
 - a. Suspicions of abuse should only be shared with pastoral staff and the Clerk of Session.
 - b. When law enforcement, social agencies or the public media are involved, the Session is to be informed.
4. Responding to the Child/Youth
 - a. All allegations from a child or youth will be taken seriously.
 - b. Do not deny the problem, but listen to the complaint and give emotional support.
 - c. Remind the child or youth they are not at fault and that they are right in telling an adult.
 - d. Do not make a promise not to tell anyone.