



St. Paul's Presbyterian Church Child Protection Policy

General Purpose Statement

St. Paul's Presbyterian Church seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the below practices, our goal is to protect the children of St. Paul's Presbyterian Church from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and workers from false accusations.

Definitions

For purposes of this policy, the terms "child" or "children" include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years. The term "worker" includes both paid and unpaid persons who work with children.

Selection of Workers

All persons who desire to work with the children participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes the following:

a) Minimum Age

Young persons may assist adults, but may not take the place of adult workers. The church may employ responsible teens (under the age of 18) only in positions under the supervision of an approved adult worker.

b) Six Month Rule

No volunteer will be considered for any position involving contact with minors until she/he has been involved with St. Paul's Presbyterian Church for a minimum of six (6) months. This time of interaction between our leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation and suitability of the applicant for working with children.

c) Written Application

All persons seeking to work with children must complete and sign a written application in a form to be supplied by us. The application may request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with children, previous church affiliation, reference and employment information, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. The application form will be maintained in confidence on file at the church.

d) Personal Interview

Upon completion of the application, a face-to-face interview may be scheduled with the applicant to discuss his/her suitability for the position.

e) Criminal Background Check

A PA criminal background check, PA Child Abuse and an FBI Check (for all paid employees and individuals who have not lived in PA for the past 10 consecutive years) is required. Clearances must be renewed every five years.

Before a background check is run, prospective workers will be asked to sign an authorization form allowing SPPC to run the check. If an individual declines to sign the authorization form, s/he will be unable to work with children.

A disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by the Session of SPPC on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. Generally, convictions for an offense involving children and/or for offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to our mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying event.

The background check authorization form and results will be maintained in confidence on file at the church.

f) Vehicle Safety

Persons who drive SPPC owned or privately – owned vehicles for conducting church business or transporting children on a regular basis must maintain a current valid PA driver's license, provide proof of insurance in such amounts as may be required by the church and comply with all other church transportation policies.

g) Identification of Workers and badges

All church employees and volunteer workers who work with children 5th grade and under are required to wear an identification nametag whenever they are supervising children. These tags will be provided by the church.

h) Acknowledgement of church policies

All applicants must acknowledge in writing that they understand the church's policies pertaining to the protection of children and that they agree to abide by them. This requirement will be met by having applicants sign the Acknowledgement of Receipt form.

Two Adult Rule

It is our goal that a minimum of two adult workers will be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during our programs and activities. Some youth classes may have only one adult teacher in attendance during the class session; in these instances, doors to the classroom should remain open. We do not allow minors to be alone with one adult on our premises or in any sponsored activity unless in a counseling situation.

Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

RECOGNIZING CHILD ABUSE

Child abuse is not always obvious and many children are too young or too frightened to tell anyone what is happening to them. Children, especially younger, more vulnerable children, are often unaware that what is happening to them is abuse. Sometimes, it takes a caring adult – like a teacher, child care worker, pastor, family member or neighbor – to recognize that something is not right in the child’s life. The following is a list of physical and emotional indicators of child abuse.

INDICATORS OF CHILD ABUSE

The following list of indicators may be used as a guide to help determine if there is a suspicion of child abuse or neglect. These indicators can also exist in situations where a child is NOT abused or neglected; they are only suggestive of abuse or neglect. The presence of any one or more of these indicators may have an entirely appropriate or unrelated explanation.

INDICATORS OF PHYSICAL ABUSE – CHILD

- Unexplained bruises, welts, human bite marks, bald spots
- Numerous bruises in various stages of healing
- Marks on many surfaces of the body
- Unexplained burns, especially cigarette or immersion burns
- Withdrawal or aggression – behavioral extremes
- Uncomfortable with physical contact
- Afraid to go home
- Dressed inappropriately for the weather
- Cringes when approached by an adult (fears getting hit)
- Overreacts to accidents such as spilling milk
- Does not want to talk about home life
- Extreme attachment to parents
- Extreme attentiveness to needs of parents

INDICATORS OF PHYSICAL ABUSE – PARENT

- Contradictory statements about child's injury
- Excessive anxiety about child's behavior
- Labels child as a “problem”
- Says child makes up stories and that child should not be believed
- Verbally aggressive toward child

INDICATORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE – CHILD

- Pain or itching in genital area
- Bruises or bleeding in external genitalia
- Frequent urinary or yeast infections
- Torn, stained or bloody underclothing
- Venereal disease

- A child's report or self-disclosure
- Sexual knowledge beyond what is natural for a child
- Preoccupation with their body
- Acting out sexual behavior
- Withdrawal, chronic depression
- Self-devaluation and lack of confidence
- Problems with bedtime or afraid to go to bed
- Bedwetting – especially if it begins in a child who has been dry

INDICATORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE – PARENT

- Poor sexual relationship between parents
- Frequent changes of adults in household
- Lack of supervision of child
- Parent relates to child on adult level
- Parent is jealous of child's relationship with others
- Parent is overly possessive of child

INDICATORS OF NEGLECT OR PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE – CHILD

- Unattended medical needs
- Consistent lack of supervision
- Persistent hunger, poor hygiene or inappropriate dress
- Distended stomach or emaciated body
- Delayed physical development
- Substance abuse
- Regularly displays fatigue or listlessness
- Steals food or begs
- Habit disorders (sucking, rocking, etc.)
- Passive or aggressive behavior extremes
- Neurotic traits such as sleep disorders or inhibition of play

INDICATORS OF NEGLECT OR PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE – PARENT

- Disinterest in or rejection of child
- Deserting or avoiding child
- Threatening child, yelling, and/or screaming at child
- Ignoring medical problems of child
- Constant criticism of child, making negative comparison with other children
- Embarrassing children in public or making child feel ashamed or guilty
- Isolating child from society or normal friendships
- Placing child in dangerous situations
- Blaming child for situations not within child's control
- Failing to meet child's physical/emotional needs

REPORTING CHILD ABUSE

Childcare workers may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect of the children under our care. In the event that an individual involved in the care of children at SPPC becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child under his/her care, this should be reported immediately to the Children's Ministry Associate, Youth Director or any member of the Pastoral Staff for further action, including reporting to authorities as is mandated by state law.

In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at SPPC or during our sponsored programs or activities, the following procedure shall be followed:

1. The parent or guardian of the child will be notified.
2. The worker alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave from working with children, pending an investigation, and instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation.
3. Civil authorities will be notified, and SPPC will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists. SPPC will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities.
4. Our insurance company will be notified, and we will complete an incident report. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company.
5. The Senior Pastor will be our spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect, unless he or she is alleged to be involved. We will seek the advice of legal counsel before responding to media inquiries or releasing information to the congregation. All other representatives of the church should refrain from speaking to the media.
6. A pastoral visit will be arranged for those who desire it.
7. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position working with children or youth.

INCIDENT REPORT

The person making a report should identify:

- a) The name and address of the child
- b) The name and address of the person responsible for the care, custody, or welfare of the child.
- c) Any other pertinent information concerning the alleged or suspected abuse or neglect.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All reports of child abuse or neglect shall be held in absolute confidence. No person shall communicate any information concerning the alleged event to any person except as necessary to cooperate with any official investigation. Any break of this confidentiality by an employee of the church shall be cause for immediate dismissal. The lead pastor, in consultation with the official conducting the investigation may authorize limited additional disclosure if necessary to protect other children from harm in the near future, particularly where the person responsible for the abuse cannot be identified, but in no case shall the identity of the victim or the accused person be disclosed except as required by law.

INVESTIGATION OF ALLEGED ABUSE OR NEGLECT

No person shall attempt to conduct a detailed investigation either through examination or interrogation of the child, the accused person or a witness. It is acceptable to obtain a reasonable amount of information to have cause to believe a child has been abuse or neglected. Interviews shall be conducted only by authorized officials of the agency to whom the suspected crime has been reported or, when appropriate, by legal counsel or persons representing the church in an official capacity. All employees and volunteers of the church shall cooperate with the official investigation as requested.

SUSPENSION OF CHURCH RELATED ACTIVITIES

A person accused of child abuse or neglect will be suspended from all church related duties involving children. This would include all childcare, teaching, transportation or sponsorship duties. The Personnel Committee is not authorized to conduct an investigation of the incident but is allowed to monitor any such investigation and receive confidential information concerning the incident as may be necessary to determine issues concerning the continuation of employment and compensation. The person accused should be suspended (on 'paid leave') until the investigation is completed. This removal from duty should occur in such a way that an innocent person is not immediately deemed guilty. There are false claims made each year. If the allegation is determined to be unsubstantiated, the person can be returned to his/her position.

Open Door Policy

Classroom doors should remain open unless there is a window in the door or a side window beside it. Doors should never be locked while persons are inside the room. In all rooms in the children's wing a video camera is taping at all times as an added layer of accountability and protection.

Teenage Workers

We recognize that there may be times when it is necessary or desirable for babysitters (paid or volunteer) who are themselves under age 18 to assist in caring for children during programs or activities. The following guidelines apply to teenage workers:

- Must be at least age 14.
- Must be screened as specified above.
- Must be under the supervision of an adult and must never be left alone with children.

Check-in/Check-out Procedure

For children below second grade, a security check-in/check-out procedure will be followed. The child will be signed in by a parent or guardian at the check in station through Breeze software, parent/guardian will receive a "child check" for the child similar to a claim check. The parent or guardian must present the "child check" in order to sign out the child from our care. In the event that a parent or guardian is unable to present the "child check," parents should present a photo I.D. In an extraordinary event, if no photo I.D. is available, the Children's Ministry Director will be responsible for releasing the child to the care of a parent or guardian after discussing the surrounding circumstances with the parent or guardian.

Sick Child Policy

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all of the children at SPPC. Parents are encouraged to be considerate of other children when deciding whether to place a child under our care. In general, children with the following symptoms should NOT be dropped off:

- Fever above 100.4° F within the last 3 days
- Wheezing and/or shortness of breath
- Persistent cough or sore throat
- Any nasal drainage with yellow/green tint
- Diarrhea, vomiting, or stomach ache
- Extreme fatigue / lethargy

Safe to return when . . . no fever or symptoms for 3 days AND at least 7 days since onset of symptoms.

Children who are observed by our workers to be ill will be separated from other children and the parent or guardian will be contacted to request that the child be picked up.

Medications Policy

It is the policy of St. Paul's Presbyterian Church not to administer either prescription or non-prescription medications to the children under our care. Medications should be administered by a parent at home. Parents are reminded of our sick child policy.

Exceptions to the medications policy may be granted by parents for children on a church sponsored event or for children with potentially life-threatening conditions (such as asthma or severe allergic reactions). Parent's children with life-threatening conditions should address their situation with the staff to develop a plan of action.

Discipline Policy

It is the policy of SPPC not to administer corporal punishment, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. There should be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other physical discipline of children. Workers should consult with the family ministries staff if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

Restroom Guidelines

Children five years of age and younger should use a classroom bathroom if one is available. If a classroom bathroom is not available, workers should escort children to the hallway bathroom. They should never take a child into the bathroom alone. The workers should check the bathroom first to make sure that it is empty, and then allow the children inside. The workers should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the child back to the classroom. 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 worker should prop open the bathroom door, and leave the stall door open as they assist the child.

For the protection of all, workers 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 each class.

Accidental Injuries to Children

In the event that a child or youth is injured while under our care, the following steps should be followed:

1. For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, workers will provide First Aid (Band-Aids, etc.) as appropriate and will notify the child's parent or guardian of the injury at the time the child is picked up from our care. First Aid kits are located in the church office, the kitchen, and in the classrooms in the Nursery/Children's Wing.
2. For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple First Aid, the parent and/or guardian will immediately be summoned in addition to the worker's supervisor. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.
3. Once the child has received appropriate medical attention, an incident report will be completed in the case of injuries requiring treatment by a medical professional.