

Child/Youth/Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy
Covenant Presbyterian Church (USA)
3131 Walton Way • Augusta, Georgia 30909

Policy Application Statement

It is the policy of the Covenant Presbyterian Church (USA) (hereafter “Covenant”) that all members, officers, staff, nonmember employees and/or contractors, and volunteers shall endeavor to create and maintain a safe and nurturing environment for activities and interactions involving children, youth, and vulnerable adults. This policy applies to the Covenant preschool program and to Covenant-sponsored activities that involve children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

Definitions

The following are definitions of terms used in this policy.

Minor: Any child or youth 0–17 years old.

Child: A person between the ages of 0–11.

Youth: A person between the ages of 12– 17.

Adult: A person age 18 years or older.

Vulnerable Adult: Any adult without the developmental, physical or cognitive capacity to consent.

Child/Youth Worker: Any person (volunteer, paid staff, or contractor) who participates in Covenant sponsored events or activities involving minors.

Abuse: Mistreatment in any form (physical, sexual, emotional) of a minor or vulnerable adult.

Vulnerable Adult Abuse: Actions or failures to act that result in the physical, sexual, psychological, or emotional mistreatment, neglect, or exploitation of a vulnerable adult.

Child/Youth Abuse: Actions or failures to act that result in the physical, sexual, psychological, or emotional mistreatment, neglect, or exploitation of a child or youth.

Sexual Abuse: 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).

Sex Offender: Any individual who has been convicted of crimes involving sex.

Misuse of Technology: Use of technology that result in the harassment or abuse of a child/youth.

Session: The governing body of the church.

Mandated Reporter: A person who, because of his or her profession, is legally required to report any suspicion of child abuse or neglect to the relevant authorities

Screening, Training, and Background Checks

A child/youth worker, whether on a paid staff, contract, or volunteer basis, shall be subject to:

1. A criminal background check every six years. Child/youth workers upon request shall submit to the Covenant Finance Secretary a completed and signed information form and background check authorization form. Covenant shall cover the cost of background checks for all child/youth workers.
2. Covenant may require references from child/youth workers.
3. Those who work with minors shall participate in training on minor and vulnerable adult protection before beginning service and renewed every three years. The training is to be provided by a Session designee or through a Session-approved internet resource. All elders and deacons are encouraged to participate in Child/Youth/Vulnerable Adult training.
4. Additional training may be required for preschool staff.

The following would prevent a person from working with minors in any church sponsored activity or program for preschoolers, children, youth or vulnerable adults:

- Any crime against children. No exceptions will be made.
- Any sex crime of any type. No exceptions will be made.
- Any felony convictions or convictions of misdemeanors involving violence, drugs, or alcohol. Exceptions require the approval of the pastoral staff in the consideration of an arrest, charge and sentencing for a crime under certain circumstances.

For joint events involving minors, Covenant will endeavor to partner with other churches that have expectations similar to those reflected in this policy.

Confidentiality of Records

Under the direction of the Session, the Finance Secretary of Covenant will maintain all child/youth worker policy records, results of background checks, and related information in confidential, secured files for an appropriate length of time, generally not less than one year nor more than three years after the individual is no longer involved in programs for minors or vulnerable adults.

Reporting

Any staff member, worker (paid or volunteer), teacher, aide, or other adult participant in any Covenant-sponsored program involving children or youth must report any incident, activity, behavior or evidence noticed that reasonably appears to indicate that child abuse has occurred or may occur. Covenant staff, members, and volunteers are encouraged to make reports if they believe a disabled adult or elder person is in need of protective services or has been the victim of abuse, neglect, or exploitation.

Persons making reports shall notify the staff person in charge (Preschool Director, Pastor, or the designated delegate). The staff person in charge shall comply with any mandated reporter requirements and also comply with the Response to Allegations section of this policy.

Staff member, worker (paid or volunteer), teacher, aide, or other adult participant in any Covenant sponsored program involving children or youth should not interview or obtain history from the child(ren).

Persons making reports will not be identified without their permission, except as necessary in connection with any potential or pending legal action or criminal investigation. Reports and associated materials will be kept confidential; however, the case record may be subpoenaed as a result of court proceedings and the report cannot be assured confidentiality will be fully protected. Reporters are immune from any civil or criminal liability when a report is made in good faith.

The Pastors will be notified of all reports of known or suspected instances of child abuse.

Response to Allegations

The Pastors will convene a Response Team consisting of:

- One pastor
- One member of Session
- One member of the Education Ministry Team
- The Preschool Director (if the report involves the preschool)

The Response Team will:

- Communicate with the parents of the child or children involved. This may not be an appropriate action if the parent/guardian is suspected as the alleged perpetrator.
- Communicate with the congregation when and as appropriate.
- Select a spokesperson to handle inquiries in a discrete, informed and diplomatic way.
- Document all matters related to the reported incident and accumulate all files related to the hiring or selection of the child/youth worker(s) involved.
- Report the incident to legal counsel and to church insurance carrier, if indicated.

When a report of child abuse is made, it is essential that everyone involved handle the matter as promptly, thoroughly and discretely as possible. The following guiding principles will apply:

- All allegations will be taken seriously.
- Each report will be handled forthrightly with due respect for privacy and confidentiality.
- The victim will be cared for and not held responsible in any way.
- Full cooperation will be given to church and civil authorities under the guidance of legal counsel and in accordance with the *Book of Order* of PCUSA.

Both the victim and the accused will be treated fairly and with dignity. The care and safety of the child are the first priority. The accused should not be confronted until the child's safety has been ensured. As soon as a report is made, the accused should be temporarily removed from his or her duties pending resolution of the matter. Paid workers may be suspended with or without pay.

Guidelines for Working with Minors

1. Two non-related adults will be present in groups of children and youth. This expectation

applies to events that happen on the church campus and away from the church campus. In the event that it is not possible to have two adults in the room, the one adult will make every effort to find a public space to be with the children/youth.

2. Ratios:
 - a. Covenant Preschool – The goal for teacher to student ratio is 1:12. Floaters, volunteers, and substitutes may be available to aid the classroom teacher.
 - b. Children and Youth Ministry - The goal for adult to children/youth ratio for church-related events/activities is 2:17. There will also be one adult of each sex when there are one or more minors of different sexes in a group.
3. Volunteers under the age of 18 must (1) be a minimum of four years older than the age group they lead or supervise and (2) have adult supervision.
4. View Windows and Open Doors: When minors and adult workers or volunteers are in a room, if the door is closed, the door should have a view window. If no view window is installed in the door, the door should remain open.
5. Adults and minors are required to wear appropriate attire at church related events/activities.
6. Event leaders will monitor the arrival and pick-up of children and youth at church-sponsored activities.
7. Forms: The legal guardians of each minor shall provide the appropriate information and medical forms for their child(ren). The information form should include contact information for legal guardians, and the medical form should include a copy of the minor's health insurance card. Additional consent forms may be required for off-campus events. Forms are to be stored at the church in a secure place with restricted access.
8. Bathroom Guidelines:
 - a. Infants and Toddlers
 - i. Diaper changing by employees or volunteers will take place in the line of sight of another adult or in the church nursery rooms.
 - b. Kindergarten
 - i. Children should not be sent to the restroom alone, except for use of in-classroom restrooms.
 - ii. An adult should not be alone with a child in a restroom. If, however, this is not possible because a child needs assistance, the caregiver should inform another adult of the assistance needed and provided.
 - iii. Adults should not go into a stall with a child and shut the door.
 - c. Elementary School Children
 - i. When a child in this age group needs to use the restroom, an adult should monitor his or her whereabouts.
 - ii. If the restroom is isolated from the group, and two same sex children are sent together, they should go in separate stalls and the main bathroom door should be open with the adult standing outside.
9. Transportation: Whenever children or youth are transported away from the church property
 1. Youth should not drive other unrelated youth or children to/from events without permission from all parents/legal guardians
 2. An adult should never transport child/youth alone without permission from the minor's parent(s)/legal guardian(s)
 3. Drivers should have insurance coverage and a valid driver's license
 4. Drivers should go through same screening process as all other paid/volunteer staff
10. Overnight Trips: On overnight trips with minors, reasonable boundaries must be in place to respect the privacy of each person. Males and females should sleep in separate spaces. An adult shall not share a bed with a youth or sleep alone in a room with only one youth

(other than a child of the adult). Two or more adults are required to take or accompany minors on an overnight outing. In addition, two adults who are married to each other should not be the only adult chaperones on any overnight trip. Exceptions to these overnight rules may be made with the consent of the youth participants' parents/guardians.

11. During Covenant events and activities involving minors and vulnerable adults, volunteers and employees shall not:
 - a. Make displays of sexual affection toward a minor or vulnerable adult.
 - b. Use of profanity or off-color jokes.
 - c. Discuss sexual encounters with or around minors or vulnerable adults.
 - d. Date or become "romantically" involved with a minor or vulnerable adult.
 - e. Use or be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs in the presence of minors or vulnerable adults.
 - f. Possess sexually oriented materials—including printed or online—on church property or property being utilized for a church event or activity.
 - g. Have secrets with minors or vulnerable adults.
 - h. Stare at or comment inappropriately on minors' or vulnerable adults' bodies.
 - i. Engage in inappropriate or unapproved electronic communication with minors. It is advisable that parent(s)/legal guardian are made aware of the communications.
 - j. Act in an abusive manner, including but not limited to the following:
 - i. Verbal abuse: degrade, threaten, or curse
 - ii. Mental abuse: shame, humiliate, and act cruelly
 - iii. Neglect: withhold food, water, shelter
 - iv. Physical abuse: inclusive of corporal punishment, shaking, jerking, pinching or handling a child roughly

Policy Regarding Known Sex Offenders

Should the Session be informed that a known sex offender wishes to participate in the life of the church, the Session may appoint a task force to investigate the nature and facts of the sex offense and potential risks to church members, employees, attendees, and children present on church property, to draft a covenant between the Session and the sex offender, and to submit this covenant to the Session for approval. The content of this covenant may include the possibility of a session-approved chaperone, prohibiting access to certain areas of the church by the offender, restrictions on when the offender will be allowed on the church grounds, retrieval of directories and other published documents containing personal information of minors, restriction of access to such materials, and any other restrictions that the task force feels are necessary to ensure the safety of children, youth, and those who may be at risk.

This covenant, once approved by the Session and signed by the Clerk of Session and Moderator, will be presented to and signed by the offender. A copy of the signed covenant shall be kept in a secured file in the church office and a copy shall be given to the offender.

A failure to accept and to comply with the terms of the covenant shall result in sanctions against the known sex offender, including but not limited to: further restriction or exclusion of access to church services, programs, and property, removal from church membership, and immediate removal from church grounds.

Acceptance and Affirmation

_____ (initial) I have reviewed, understand and will comply with the
Child/Youth/Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy of Covenant Presbyterian Church.

Printed Name

Signature

Date