



HIXSON PREBYTERIAN CHURCH, PCA POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

AREA: CHILDREN'S MINISTRY	POLICY NUMBER: 9.03
POLICY: Child Protection Policy	EFFECTIVE DATE: 01/28/2005

PURPOSE OF POLICY This policy is intended to protect children participating in events sponsored by Hixson Presbyterian Church (HPC). This policy applies to HPC employees and volunteers, who have the responsibility of supervising the activities of minors age 18 and below. This policy does not constitute a contract between HPC and its employees/volunteers or any other party. It is merely a statement of policy and general guideline which HPC will seek to follow. HPC makes no guarantee to any party that all aspects of this policy will be followed in any given situation. HPC is not responsible for the individual acts of any employee/volunteer.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Child: The term "child" or "children" shall include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years.

Child abuse: Any action (or lack of action), which endangers or harms a child's physical or emotional health and development. Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes the following:

a) Physical Abuse: any physical injury to a minor, which is not accidental, such as beating, spanking, shaking, slapping, burns, or biting. Other forms of physical abuse include massages, kissing, or prolonged embracing. Examples of permissible physical contact include handshakes, high fives, pats on the back, placing an arm around the shoulders, sitting beside minors, holding hands during prayer, or brief hugs within sight of others.

b) Verbal & Emotional Abuse: persistent or extreme thwarting of a child's basic emotional need to feel safe and secure. Emotional abuse occurs in an environment of constant criticism, belittling, humiliation, or persistent teasing. Other forms of verbal and emotional abuse include language or comments that are threatening, sexual, personally intimate, related to body development, or crude, regardless of how the communication is conveyed (e.g. text messages, phone calls, social networking sites, etc.) Employees/volunteers need to avoid developing close emotional relationships with minors of the opposite sex and exercise extreme caution in dealing with minors of the same sex. At no time, shall any employee/volunteer pursue a dating relationship with a minor and should be sensitive to minors with "crushes."

c) Sexual abuse: any sexual activity between a minor and an adult or between minors, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest or exposure to pornographic material. Other forms of sexual abuse include obscene verbal comments, texts, emails, phone calls, or posts on social media. If employees/volunteers become aware of the existence of pornography in the hands of a minor, they should immediately report this to their supervisor. The National Resource Center on Child Sexual Abuse (1992) defines child sexual abuse as "any sexual activity with a child – whether in the home by a caretaker, in a day care situation, a foster/residential setting or in any other setting, including on the street by a person unknown to the child. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent or another child, provided the other child is four years older than the victim."

Employee: Any individual who is paid by HPC on a full or part-time basis, and is serving in any position involving the supervision or custody of minors.

HPC or Church: Hixson Presbyterian Church

Policy: HPC Child Protection Policy and Procedures

Response Team: A team made up of staff and members of the Session if an alleged violation of the Policy is reported.

Volunteer: Any individual who is not paid by the church, and is serving in any position involving the supervision or custody of minors.

EMPLOYEE/VOLUNTEER SELECTION AND SCREENING PROCESS

HPC believes that appropriate personal relationships between adult employees/volunteers and minors of the church foster the community of Christ. HPC will seek to prevent the abuse of minors when they are participating in church programs. Preventive measures include employee/volunteer screening, training and supervision of all employees/volunteers and a commitment to eliminating opportunities for abuse within church programs. The employee/volunteer screening and selection process includes the following:

1. Written application:

All individuals seeking to work with minors in a paid or volunteer position must do the following:

- a. Complete a confidential written application
- b. Read, agree with, and sign the any applicable policies and procedures and this Child Protection Policy
- c. Give written permission for a criminal background check
- d. Provide personal references as requested
- e. Be interviewed by the Children's Ministry Director and/or another designated person.

Approval to work with minors must be granted by the Children's Ministry Director. The application will be maintained in confidence on file at HPC.

2. Criminal background check:

A criminal background check and child sex abuse registry check will be required for applicants 18 years of age and older. No one who has been convicted of a felony or any crime involving misconduct with children will be allowed to work with children. The Children's Ministry Director and the Associate Pastor of Youth and Families will address with the applicant any questionable information revealed in the background check or sex abuse registry. Completing the application to work with children authorizes the church to conduct these checks. Background checks will be kept confidential in a locked file at HPC with access afforded only to appropriate staff on a need-to-know basis. As long as the employee/volunteer continues to work in the respective ministry, a background report will be re-checked every two years.

3. Six-Month Rule:

No applicant will be considered for a volunteer position involving contact with minors until they have been involved with HPC for a minimum of (6) six months. The Children's Ministry Director, with the prior approval of the Associate Pastor of Youth and Families, reserves the right to grant exceptions to this policy which will be documented in the applicant's file.

4. Employees/Volunteers who are minors:

Employees/volunteers, who are themselves under age 18, are a valuable resource in the care and nurture of our covenant children. The following guidelines apply to these employees/volunteers.

- a. Volunteers must be at least 14 years old; employees must be at least 16 years old.
- b. Minor employees/volunteers will be screened and trained as specified above with the exception of a required criminal records check.
- c. Applications submitted by a minor employee/volunteer must be signed by their parent/guardian where indicated.

PROCEDURES AND SUPERVISORY REQUIREMENTS

HPC has a zero tolerance for abuse in its programs and ministry activities. It is the responsibility of every employee/volunteer in children and youth ministries to act in the best interest of all minors in every program. The following requirements shall be applicable to all employees/volunteers who have contact with minors participating in any program at HPC.

1. Safety of children:

It is the responsibility of employees/volunteers to promote the emotional and physical safety of minors giving regard to all factors and circumstances known to them. If in their opinion, an unsafe condition exists; they shall immediately take appropriate precautions to protect all minors.

2. Two worker rule:

A reasonable effort will be made to have two non-related employees/volunteers present in the room, or nearby, with minors during church activities. One-on-one contact between minors and employees/volunteers should be avoided. HPC recognizes that there will be times when an unaccompanied employee/volunteer may be present with a group of minors. In those circumstances, (such as Sunday school or small group time in Kingdom Kids) doors to the room will be open and windows uncovered or the activity will be conducted in a public space, in view of other adults or minors. Any meetings that occurs between one employee/volunteer and a single minor shall have written parental consent from each participant on file in the Children's Ministry Director's office before the meeting occurs.

3. Observation of children's activities:

Activities for children should be scheduled in areas visible from adjoining areas. Such visibility will be maintained by leaving curtains and blinds open and, wherever possible, by leaving the door to the room open. At no time will an adult meet alone with a child in any room where the door is closed or in an area where they cannot be seen. A clear, unobstructed glass window shall be installed in the doors or walls of all classrooms and offices typically occupied by children.

4. Ratio of employee/volunteers to minors:

When supervising minors, it is required that a reasonable ratio of employees/volunteers to minors be maintained at all times. The supervisor overseeing the age group shall be primarily responsible for setting and maintaining a reasonable ratio of employees/volunteers to minors giving due regard to all factors present, including the number and age of the participants, the nature of the activities and the location where the activities are taking place.

5. Overnight procedures:

Overnight activities will require a signed permission statement from the parent/guardian of the minors participating and must have a minimum of two employees/volunteers and maintain a ratio of one employee/volunteer per nine (9) minors. An employee/volunteer may never sleep in the same bed with a minor. There must be both male and female employees/volunteers present at all co-ed overnights and at least two same-gender employees/volunteers on same-gender overnights.

6. Release of claims:

Prior to any activity away from the church's grounds, a Release of Claims must be signed by the child's parent/guardian. Without the form signed and in the possession of the church, the child will not be allowed to participate in the away activity.

7. No confidentiality:

Employees/volunteers can never promise confidentiality to a minor. Employees/volunteers must report to the their supervisor if a minor discusses harming himself or others, committing a crime or being abused.

8. Digital privacy:

Inappropriate use of cameras, imaging, or digital devices is prohibited. It is inappropriate to use any device capable of recording or transmitting visual images in areas where privacy is expected by participants. Posting ANY images on the internet is not allowed unless permission has been granted by the parents and approved by your supervisor.

PROCEDURES AND SUPERVISORY REQUIREMENTS continued...

9. Hazing and bullying:

Physical hazing and initiations are prohibited. Verbal, physical, and cyber bullying are prohibited.

10. Controlled substances:

The use of tobacco, alcohol, drugs and/or mind altering substances with minors is prohibited.

11. Periodic training and review of policies & procedures:

The Children's Ministry Director shall review this Policy with all employees/volunteers on an annual basis or when a change or addition is made to the policy. Each employee/volunteer shall acknowledge receipt of a written copy of the policy and of his/her participation in the annual training prior to the time they commence working with children and after each change to such policy. The signed acknowledgements shall be retained in the personnel file of the employee/volunteer.

DISCIPLINE PROCEDURES

No form of punishment that involves pain or physical discomfort may be used. Minors may be restrained if they are in danger of hurting themselves or others. Disruptive minors may be removed from the group to another part of the room. CONSEQUENCES FOR VIOLATING THE POLICY: Any employee/volunteer accused of committing any act considered by the Policy to be harmful to a minor shall immediately be placed on 'administrative leave' until an official investigation by DCS or local law enforcement is completed. Following the official investigation by state and local authorities, any employee/volunteer found in violation of the Policy shall be prohibited from future participation in all HPC ministries for minors. See the Response Plan section for further information on suspension and termination so as not to harm the reputation of the accused before DCS completes its investigation.

REPORTING ALLEGED CHILD ABUSE

1. Reporting Obligation:

Tennessee state law mandates that anyone who has knowledge of or suspects abuse or neglect of a child must report it. The law makes no distinction between professional and non-professionals on the issue of reporting. Employees/Volunteers involved in HPC ministries to minors must be aware of their individual responsibility to report any good faith suspicion or belief that a minor is or has been physically or sexually abused, physically or emotionally neglected, exposed to any form of violence or threat, exposed to any form of sexual exploitation including the possession, manufacture, or distribution of child pornography, online solicitation, enticement or showing of obscene material. Employees who fail to report a prohibited act witnessed or suspected by them are violating this Policy and are subject to termination of employment. Volunteers who fail to report a prohibited act witnessed or suspected by them may be restricted from participation in activities involving minors. Minors, whether employees or volunteers, are exempt from this reporting requirement but are strongly encouraged to do so.

2. To Whom To Report:

Nothing in this policy negates the right or responsibility of HPC employees/volunteers (Reporter) to report suspicions of abuse to the Tennessee Department of Children's Services (DCS) or the appropriate local law enforcement agency

a. Report Incident to TN Department of Children's Services or Law Enforcement Agency.

An employee/volunteer (Reporter) may bring the case to an immediate supervisor and allow the supervisor to make the appropriate report to DCS or a law enforcement agency. The supervisor who receives the initial allegation from a worker will promptly report the allegation to the Tennessee Department of Children Services Child Abuse Hotline or local law enforcement. The Reporter should confirm that the supervisor has reported the matter to DCS or law enforcement.

Contact information: TN Department of Children's Services (DCS) Child Abuse Hotline: 1-877-542-2873. Someone is available 24/7. Resources regarding reporting information:

<http://www.state.tn.us/youth/dcsguide/policies/chap14/14.1.pdf>

The Hamilton County Sheriff Department (423) 209-7000

REPORTING ALLEGED CHILD ABUSE continued...

b. Report Incident to church leadership.

An employee/volunteer (Reporter) is required to promptly report an incident to their immediate supervisor and the supervisor will promptly notify the Response Team. The Reporter will be asked to fill out a HPC Report of Suspected Child Abuse or Neglect Form, which is available from a supervisor and attached to this policy. No employee/volunteer shall attempt to conduct a detailed investigation either through examination or interview of the child, the accused person or a witness. It is acceptable for the church staff supervisor receiving the report to obtain a reasonable amount of information about the incident to have cause to believe a child has been abused or neglected. In depth interviews of the child, the accused or a witness shall be conducted only by authorized officials of DCS or the local law enforcement agency to whom the suspected crime has been reported or, when appropriate, by the church's legal counsel.

RESPONSE PLAN

If an incident of child abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred on the premises of HPC or during a sponsored program or activity, the following procedure shall be implemented:

1. The Supervisor who receives the report in consultation with the Response Team will designate a person to notify the parent or guardian of the minor unless the parent or guardian is the person responsible for the abuse or neglect.
2. If the person against whom an allegation has been made is an employee/volunteer (Respondent), then the Respondent will immediately be placed on 'administrative leave' pending an investigation. For Employees, the outcome of the investigation will determine whether the leave is paid or unpaid. Removal from duty should occur in such a way that the accused person is not immediately deemed guilty. If the allegation is determined to be unsubstantiated, the employee/volunteer can be returned to their prior position. The Response Team will keep the Personnel Committee informed of the DCS investigation so that the Personnel Committee can make decisions regarding continuation of employment and compensation.
3. HPC will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists.
4. HPC's attorney and insurance company will be notified.
5. If the alleged abuse involves an ordained pastor at HPC, the Tennessee Valley Presbytery will be notified and the Stated Clerk's office made aware of the situation.
6. HPC will cooperate fully with any investigation of the incident by DCS or local authorities.
7. The Response Team will select one person to act as the official spokesperson for HPC, who will be available to the media to answer questions and to interpret the child protection policy. The use of a prepared statement with the advice of legal counsel shall be the means by which the child protection policy will be described to the public. The church should emphasize to the public its position on child abuse, its concern for the victim and the extensive steps being taken to address the safety of all children.
8. 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 an official investigation. Any breach of this confidentiality by a HPC employee/volunteer may be cause for immediate dismissal. The Response Team, in consultation with the state or local agency official conducting the investigation, may authorize limited additional disclosure if necessary to protect other minors 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. Any person who is found guilty of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position with minors.
9. The church staff shall encourage and assist the child and the parents in securing appropriate counseling, care and support. In the event the abuse or neglect involves a member or employee of the church, the staff shall encourage and assist the individual in securing appropriate care and support including third-party counseling.