

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

Adopted February 2013

Revised December 2019

STATEMENT OF COVENANT

As a Christian community of faith and a member of the Presbyterian Church in America, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that ensure the safety and spiritual growth of our children and youth, as well as workers with children and youth. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; we will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events; we will educate our workers regarding the use of all appropriate policies.

MEMBERSHIP REQUIREMENT FOR ALL LEADERS

Any protection policy starts with the assurance that all leaders for every ministry at Potomac Hills will be members (those who have been in the church at least a few months, gone through a membership class, and been received into membership by the elders). Membership shows that someone is willing to submit to the leadership of the church, and until they have made that commitment, we cannot allow them to lead and minister to others in the name of the church. Therefore, anyone who functions in a leadership role, whether teacher, nursery worker, music team or sound member, youth ministry volunteer, etc. must be a member. Non-members may attend and participate in many areas, but not lead. The only exception is for parents whose children are in a class or nursery. They are allowed to sit in with them, but they will not be considered for regular rotation until they join the church.

BACKGROUND CHECKS FOR ALL VOLUNTEERS OVER THE AGE OF 18

Any person over the age of 18 working with anyone under the age of 18 will submit a release form to have a background check run through a service (currently LexisNexis). If any red flags or criminal background information comes to light that was not known, the Associate Pastor over children's ministry and the Session will determine the level of involvement in which the person may participate. No one who has been prosecuted for a sexual offense or any offenses involving children will be allowed to work with children.

Hired child-care workers do not need to be members, but they must still submit to a background check.

TWO ADULT GUIDELINE

It is our goal that an adult will not be alone with an individual child that is not from their family. Two adult workers should be present during any church activity that includes minors. Situations may arise where these standards cannot be met. In such cases, the adult in charge will use their best judgment in assigning appropriate supervision. This includes Sunday School, when the co-teacher is not in class, the other teacher should line up a substitute to help them with the class. Children's Church, where two classes meet in the cafeteria, only needs two adults between them. In youth ministry, informal one-on-one situations often occur, such as when a leader takes a teenager out for lunch. In these situations, great care should be taken by the youth leader to inform a parent, and conduct such meetings only in public places and with the same gender.

OVERNIGHT ACTIVITIES OR RETREATS

Special attention is given to overnight activities or retreats. All adult chaperones and supervisors are cleared in advance with the staff person in charge of Children's or Youth ministries. A minimum of two adults will be assigned to every sleeping area for children through Middle School age, and one adult for High School children. Anyone under 18 must not be considered a supervisor or adult chaperone. Additionally, an individual should be more than 2 years removed from an age group before helping lead that group (a college student should be a Junior before helping with High School, etc).

APPROPRIATE TOUCHING

Care will be taken that touch and conduct are appropriate for the age group with which you are working. **Infants** may need to be patted, held, hugged or rocked. When changing diapers for children not in your own family, it will be done in the nursery area where at least one other worker has visibility of changing area. **Toddlers and Pre-Schoolers** also need to be hugged and held from time to time. Any assistance with restrooms or clothing will be minimal and only as requested by the child. **School-age children and teens** haven't grown too old for a caring and affirming touch from an adult. Care should be taken with this age group to avoid any contact that could be misinterpreted. Limiting hugs to "Side hugs" is always wise for adult-initiated contact, particularly for those of the opposite gender.

DISCIPLINE

Workers are never to spank, hit, grab, shake, or otherwise physically discipline anyone. Please refer to the Discipline Guidelines at the end of this document for further information on Discipline.

VERBAL ABUSE

Workers are never to say anything verbally abusive or violent, and never make comments of a sexual nature except in a teaching or counseling context.

SEXUAL ABUSE

In general, sexual abuse includes any form of sexual contact or exploitation with a minor that is used for the sexual arousal or gratification of the offender, the minor or a third party. Child sexual abuse can include touching or non-touching behaviors. It is a criminal behavior.

REPORT ANYTHING SUSPICIOUS

Adults need to report anything they view as suspicious to the children's ministry director, an elder, or a pastor, who will then bring the allegation to the Session. If the suspected party is a member of the church, the Session will investigate in accordance with the Rules of Discipline contained in the PCA Book of Church Order. If he or she is not a member, the Session will determine how best to proceed and whether to contact authorities.

If active abuse is observed, intervene and do your utmost to stop abusive or inappropriate behavior. After the incident, report it to the elders, pastors, or ministry director.

If abuse is reported (but not observed), DO NOT confront the accused with the allegation. Avoid, if possible, being drawn into discussion of the truth or falsity of allegation, and assigning blame or taking any steps that involve establishing or refuting the allegation until the Session, with the assistance of legal counsel, determines that addressing the allegation is appropriate.

Mandatory reporters (such as pastors, teachers, law enforcement agents, etc.) who are members of the church still have to follow Virginia law as it is applicable to their profession.

Upon receiving a report of alleged child abuse, the pastor in charge of that area of ministry or the whole session must:

- Contact the church's legal counsel. Currently, that would be Gammon & Grange.
- Immediately determine (with the assistance of legal counsel) whether a report of the allegation to the Virginia Department of Social Services is required by applicable state law.
- Ensure that any legally required report has in fact been made. DSS will help determine next steps and/or will conduct an investigation if warranted.
- Document all procedures observed in handling the allegation.
- Subject to advice of legal counsel, report the allegation to the church insurance carrier.
- If advised by legal counsel and consistent with any instructions received from DSS, notify the alleged victim's parents if it is not known that they have previous knowledge of the alleged incident, and if the suspected abuser is not the parent or caretaker.
- If the accused has assigned church duties, that person must be relieved temporarily of those duties until the investigation is concluded.
- Extend whatever pastoral care, counseling, and resources are necessary.

SIGNING CHILDREN IN AND OUT OF NURSERY

Nursery workers will require parents (not older siblings) to sign children in and out of the nursery. There will be a sheet for parents to sign when they bring the child and when they pick the child up, as well as leaving a cell number. Both nurseries have nametags to be placed on the backs of children after they are signed in. If the nursery worker doesn't recognize the parent picking up the child, they may ask for ID. Sunday School Nursery workers will be asked to stay until 10:30 to help with the overlap of the two nurseries, and to help sign children in for the worship service.

RETURNING FROM CLASSES IN THE CAFETERIA

All teachers of classes in the cafeteria (both Sunday School and Children's Church) will be expected to bring children to the auditorium after class is over. For Children's Church, someone will notify them when the closing worship song is being sung, and they will bring the children back to the auditorium and watch them find their parents.

VOLUNTEERS OUTSIDE CHURCH

Those who have an official role as volunteer staff in children's ministries are considered "on duty" at any church event and should conduct themselves accordingly. Any contacts with children apart from church sponsored events or activities must be considered personal; the church, its Session, and employees will be released and held harmless from any responsibility, penalty or claims for and actions by such parties.

Potomac Hills Presbyterian Church Nursery Policies/Procedures

We are so glad that you have brought your child to our nursery! We strive to make the nursery a happy, positive environment for your little ones. We have set these policies in place for your comfort and family's health and safety. It is our desire that parents attend our Sunday school and Worship Service and grow in the knowledge and wisdom of His grace with the peace that your child is in good hands.

General Policies/Information

- Parents are asked to sign in their child when they drop them off, leaving a cell number with the nursery worker. Then they will be asked to sign their child out at the end. Parents are asked to pick up their child from the nursery promptly after the Worship service ends.
- The nursery is equipped with age-appropriate toys and supplies. Please do not bring personal toys into the nursery unless necessary.
- PLEASE LABEL what your child brings into the nursery (bottles, bags, cups)
- The toys are cleaned and disinfected on a regular basis.
- There are always at least two adults and often one youth helper in the nursery. Older siblings and other helpers should not be in the nursery unless they are on the nursery schedule. Nursery volunteers use discretion if they need more help with the nursery children.
- Our nursery is provided for children from birth to age 3.

Health Policy

To keep our nursery a healthy place for all children, please use your best judgment in keeping your child home or out of the nursery when he is ill or exhibits any of the following symptoms and/or illnesses within 24 hours of church functions:

- Fever greater than 99.0
- Runny nose with colored mucus*
- Questionable rashes*
- Barky cough or cough with congestion
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea (unless caused by antibiotics)
- Active Chicken Pox
- Measles or Mumps
- Conjunctivitis (pink eye)

*Allergies may cause these symptoms – please notify the nursery volunteer. We realize these symptoms hang on long after a child is no longer contagious.

Medicine should not be brought into the nursery and must be administered by the parent only. If your child is being treated with antibiotics, he should be on the drug for at least 24 hours prior to coming into the nursery.

POTOMAC HILLS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

DISCIPLINE GUIDELINES FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

One of the aims for Sunday school teachers is to provide love, along with prayer, that makes it easy for children to respond to the teacher, the classroom, and God. When discipline becomes necessary, the delivery will be thoughtful, loving, and firm.

1. **The goal of discipline should be to build self-control and responsibility.** Rebuke to correct the behavior and increase their understanding.
1 Thessalonians 5:8: *“But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled.”*
2. **The dignity of each child should be preserved.** A child should not be made to feel ashamed or rejected by discipline.
3. **Discipline methods need to promote a positive learning climate.** Their misbehavior can be used as an opportunity to teach an important life-lesson.
Galatians 6:10: *“...as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”*
4. **Private correction is preferable and more effective than public rebuke because it communicates respect and maintains a positive learning environment.** If necessary, have your teaching partner take the child aside. You can also isolate them (within eye view) with a brief “time out”. Before letting them rejoin the class, remind them about the appropriate behavior and the next level of discipline.
5. **Provide positive reinforcement for those who obey.** It can be a strong motivator, especially for those kids who misbehave to gain attention. This reinforcement can be in the form of: praise, treats, stickers, stars, reward box (of small, inexpensive, age appropriate toys) or some combination, thereof. Consider creating a simple chart that could be used to gauge their behavior.
6. **Begin teaching only when you have the attention of all the kids.**
7. **Establish the rules of behavior and post them where they can be seen:**
 - 7.1. Honor God with your behavior by showing respect for elders and others at all times.
 - 7.2. Be attentive listeners when others are speaking.
 - 7.3. Make every effort to participate in class activities to gain a better understanding of God and His word.
8. **Explain the disciplinary procedures.** Explain the procedures in an age appropriate way to each child so they will understand the consequences of misbehavior.
 - 8.1. **Reminder.** Standing next to the child who is misbehaving or placing your hand on their shoulder is sometimes all that is needed to correct their behavior. Encourage them in appropriate behavior.

- 8.2. **Warning.** You may need to hold a private conference with the child away from the class. Explain the behavior problem and restate consequences. Pray with them concerning the misbehavior.
- 8.3. **Seek and speak with the parents.** If the child is uncooperative and refuses to be obedient, seek out the parents, explain the problem behavior and the methods you've tried and ask for their help.
- 8.4. **Conference with parents, teacher, Director of Children's Ministries, and the Pastor.** This is the last level of discipline before the child will be removed from class.
- 8.5. **Removal from class.**

Proverbs 3:11-12: *"My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in."*