

**WPC CHILD PROTECTION POLICY**



## **PURPOSE**

The Session, members, and staff of Westminster Presbyterian Church (WPC) recognize that our children and youth are entrusted to the care of adults who lead church ministries and activities both on and off WPC property and also in educational or recreational programs operated by others on WPC property.

WPC is committed to maintaining an environment in which children and youth are protected from physical, verbal, and sexual abuse, and in which church staff, teachers, and volunteer workers are protected from potential false allegations of abuse.

To achieve the goals of preventing incidents of abuse or the unfounded assertion of such conduct, WPC has developed appropriate procedures to be observed in the following areas:

- \* The screening and selection of workers involved in the supervision or custody of minors;
- \* Orientation and training of approved workers;
- \* Supervision of these workers by trained leadership;
- \* Reporting of and responding to any incident and/or allegation of the abuse of a minor.

This policy is intended to protect children and youth from abuse in church sponsored events. The general policy and procedures shall apply to all persons, whether compensated staff, teachers, or volunteer workers, all church members, visitors, and guests. This policy does not constitute a contract between the church and its workers. As situations arise in the future which are not adequately covered by the policy, revisions will be made by the Session of WPC.

## DEFINITIONS

**CHILD ABUSE:** Any willful act or threatened act that results in any physical, mental, or sexual injury or harm that causes or is likely to cause the child's physical, mental, or emotional health to be significantly impaired. Abuse of a child includes acts or omissions. Corporal discipline of a child by a parent or legal custodian for disciplinary purpose does not in itself constitute abuse when it does not result in harm to the child.

**CHILD PROTECTION POLICY:** The current version that has been approved by the Session of WPC.

**CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND/OR MINORS:** Any unmarried and unemancipated person under 18 years of age involved in programs provided at or sponsored by WPC.

**DCF:** (Florida) Department of Children and Families

**MANDATORY REPORTER:** Although every person has a responsibility to report suspected abuse or neglect, some occupations are specified in Florida law as required to do so. These occupations are considered "professionally mandatory reporters." A professionally mandatory reporter of child abuse/neglect is required by Florida Statute to provide his or her name to the Abuse Hotline Counselor when reporting. A professionally mandatory reporter's name is entered into the record of the report, but is held confidential (§ 39.202, F.S. and 415.107, F.S.)

**"OCCASIONAL" TEACHERS AND WORKERS:** Any other paid or volunteer worker who serves in some capacity in a WPC ministry to children and/or youth less than four times in a three-month period. They agree to submit to the leadership and government of the church in their service.

**"REGULAR" TEACHERS AND WORKERS:** Any paid or volunteer worker who serves in a WPC ministry to children and/or youth four or more times in a three-month period. They agree to submit to the leadership and government of the church in their service.

**STAFF:** any person who receives a salary from WPC and or holds the position of pastor, director, coordinator, or administrator.

**WPC:** Westminster Presbyterian Church

## **POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

- 1.1. WPC is subject to Florida law regarding the protection of children and youth.
- 1.2. WPC will seek to prevent the abuse of children and youth participating in church ministries. Preventative measures shall include screening, training, and supervision of custodians of minors, particularly including teachers and workers as defined in this policy.
- 1.3. It shall be the responsibility of the WPC staff member accountable for any WPC ministry that involves minors to ensure that appropriate practices are implemented within those programs and activities to reduce the risk of abuse. The specific circumstances of each ministry shall be considered in the development of those program-specific practices.
- 1.4. Entities or other organizations that use WPC facilities in any way that involves minors must agree to abide by this policy. Requests for any exceptions to this policy and provision will be considered only when presented in writing and approved in writing by the WPC Session or its designee.

### **TRAINING:**

- 2.1. All regular teachers and workers will be given a written copy of this policy. They will be required to have read this policy when applying to serve with the children/youth ministry.
- 2.2. Information and instruction concerning this policy and related abuse issues involving children/youth shall be offered periodically, and at least annually, at WPC. The following goals will be addressed:
  - Protection of all children/youth in all WPC ministries and activities.
  - Protection of providers from exposure to "high risk" situations and false accusations.
  - Awareness of the signs and symptoms of abuse.
  - Understanding of the reporting procedures and the procedures for responding to incidents/reasonably suspected incidents of abuse.
- 2.3. This information and instruction is required training for each new regular teacher and worker involved in the custody of children/youth.

## SCREENING

- 3.1. All regular teachers, workers and other persons involved in the custody and care of children/youth at WPC must have been a member of the church for at least six (6) months. Exceptions to this provision will be made only in cases where the WPC staff member directly responsible for the ministry in question recommends and requests that an exception be made in the case of a given individual and obtains approval of the exception from the WPC Session or its designee.
- 3.2. All regular teachers and workers will need to complete the application and screening process in order to serve children/youth at WPC. They will also be required to go through an annual renewal process that will take place in August of each year under the direction of the WPC Child Protection Policy Administrator.
- 3.3. All new regular teachers and workers involved in the custody and care of children/youth at WPC shall complete a confidential application that will ask for references and include questions concerning child abuse. The application will be submitted to the WPC staff person responsible for the ministry. Before an applicant is permitted to work with children, at least two of the applicants' references will be checked. These references should be of an institutional nature as opposed to personal or family references, preferably from organizations where the applicant has worked with children in the past. Documentation of the reference checks will be maintained in confidence on file at WPC. Upon completion of the application, a face-to-face interview may be scheduled with the applicant to discuss his/her suitability for the position.
- 3.4. Application files for all regular teachers and workers shall be maintained by WPC and shall include the application and the results of any investigations or inquiries made pursuant to an applicant's responses on these forms.
- 3.5. The personnel files of all compensated WPC staff working with children/youth shall include the application and the results of any investigations or inquiries made pursuant to an applicant's responses on these forms.

- 3.6. Confidentiality of the completed and signed forms utilized to implement this policy shall be maintained by limiting the access to these filed forms to the senior pastor, the WPC staff member directly responsible for the ministry specific to the application, and the Session or its designees.
- 3.7. The application and information gained as a result of any reference check, background check, or other related investigation of persons whose offer to serve is withdrawn or declined before engaging in service will be destroyed.
- 3.8. Adults who have been convicted of either sexual or physical abuse are not permitted to provide supervisory services in any church-sponsored activity or ministry for children/youth.
- 3.9. Occasional teachers and workers who have not been screened will serve only in the presence of, and under the supervision of, a regular teacher or worker who has been screened and approved.
3. 10. WPC recognizes that there may be times when it is necessary or desirable for babysitters (paid or volunteer) who are themselves under the age of 18 to assist in caring for children during ongoing, regularly scheduled programs or activities. The following guidelines apply to such workers:
  - A. Workers must be at least age 13
  - B. Workers will be screened as specified above, as applicable.
  - C. Workers under age 15 must be under the supervision of an adult.
3. 11. Background checks and/or reference checks on regular teachers and workers will be made by or under the direction of the WPC Child Protection Policy Administrator.
- 3.12. Adult survivors of childhood sexual or physical abuse need the love and acceptance of the WPC family. Individuals who have such a history should discuss their desire to work with children with a member of the WPC pastoral staff prior to applying for, or engaging in, any volunteer service involving children/youth.

## **SUPERVISION**

- 4.1. Teachers, workers and other persons involved in the custody and care of children/youth at WPC shall observe the "two adult rule," which requires an adult working with children/youth to be accompanied by another worker (unrelated to them). The "two adult rule" shall be followed whenever possible. The "two adult rule" must be adhered to strictly in areas considered to be high isolation settings. The "two adult rule" may include and allow for scenarios in which an adult regular teacher or worker is assisted by a youth worker who is older than the children/youth being supervised, provided that they meet the qualifications set forth in 3.10 and with the approval of the WPC staff member directly responsible for that area of ministry.
- 4.2. One-on-one supervision of a minor or any other exception to the "two adult rule" is acceptable **ONLY** in the event it occurs in a public area that is not considered to be a high isolation setting **OR** if parental permission is received in advance. Ministerial staff members are exempt from this item in emergency crisis counseling situations.
- 4.3. All rooms used by adults and minors together should be accessible (unlocked doors) and have open visibility (a window in the door or the door left open).
- 4.4. Compensated church staff or their designees shall make unannounced visits each month to all scheduled classes or small group situations involving children, youth, teachers, and workers.
- 4.5. Parents or legal guardians are welcome to observe any activity involving their child.
  - 4.5a While all parents or legal guardians are welcome to observe any activity involving their child, they may not function as volunteers while observing, unless previously screened and approved (see section 3 of policy).

### **Nursery Specific Procedures**

- 4.5b When observing, parental observers must avoid initiating interactions with children other than their own.
- 4.5c When observing, parental observers may **NOT** change diapers or clothing of any child besides their own.
- 4.5d When observing, parental observers may **NOT** administer snacks, food, or medicine, to any child besides their own.

4.5e When observing, parental observers may NOT discipline any child besides their own.

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- 4.5f When observing, parental observers will be permitted to enter the nursery, but only for a limited amount of time (not the entirety of the event) and only for a specific purpose to be approved by Nursery volunteers, Team Lead, or Coordinator.
- 4.5g When observing, parental observers must submit to the judgment and authority of the Nursery volunteers, Nursery Team Lead, and Nursery Coordinator.

### **General Procedures**

- 4.5h Parental observers may be present for portions of a given program, but are not entitled to stay for the entirety of a program unless given approval by the WPC member directly responsible for that area of ministry.
  - 4.5i Parental observers must NOT use the same bathrooms as children and/or youth. They must use a bathroom in another portion of the church facility.
  - 4.5j Parental observers must submit to the authority and judgment of WPC staff members while observing an activity. WPC staff reserve the right to ask parental observers to leave immediately for suspicious or questionable conduct while observing a WPC activity.
- 4.6. WPC teachers and workers will not search children.
- 4.7. Physical force will not be used except in self-defense or when deemed necessary to prevent possible injury. Teachers and workers will work in teams in all significant discipline problems.
- 4.8. All planned children's and youth activities away from church property will require a signed permission statement from parents or guardians.
- 4.9. All teachers or workers for any overnight church activity involving minors must be approved in advance by the WPC staff responsible for that program.

- 4.10. Room and Sleeping arrangements for overnight trips/activities. A chaperone will not occupy a room with students overnight unless there is an additional (and unrelated) chaperone who can occupy the same room. Chaperones will not share the same bed as students. Students will be separated according to sex. Chaperones will possess a room key for all rooms. This policy does not apply to parents rooming with their own children (and only their children).
- 4.11. The parent or guardian is responsible for ensuring that the child is not left alone in an unsupervised area. Pick up of children up to and including 2nd grade shall only be by the parent or guardian unless written, signed notification is provided for other arrangements.
- 4.12. For the safety of all children and youth, no minor is allowed to bring knives, lighters, fireworks, or other hazardous items.
- 4.13. Posting of media featuring minors. Media that is recorded in a public setting and that does not violate any expectation of privacy can be legally posted. However, as a general safeguard, parents of any minors involved in WPC ministry activities where the taking of photographs and video is commonplace will be asked to sign an annual media release form.

**PROCEDURES FOR REPORTING**  
**INCIDENTS OF ABUSE INVOLVING MINORS**

- 5.1. The facts and circumstances of an incident shall be documented. The WPC staff person directly responsible for the area of ministry involved or the senior pastor shall be informed and notified of the incident of abuse. The WPC staff person will inform the senior pastor. In the event the person making the report wishes to remain anonymous or otherwise prefers not to document the report, the WPC staff person or senior pastor notified of the incident shall document the report.
- 5.2. The senior pastor or designee shall be responsible for securing the safety of the potential victim in cases where DCF is not responsible for the potential victim, for immediate notification of parents/guardian of the potential victim, and for notification of the person accused of the abuse. The safety of the potential victim must be safeguarded before contacting the person(s) accused of abuse.

- 5.3. The person(s) alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct, or so charged, shall be immediately relieved of further responsibilities involving direct contact with minors until all investigations are completed and the allegations are cleared. If charges are made, the Session shall consult with the accused regarding future responsibilities.
- 5.4. The senior pastor or his designee shall report incidents of alleged abuse to legal counsel for the church, the liability insurer for the church (incident report), and the Session or the committee of the Session designated to receive and address any such reports. The Senior pastor or his designee shall document all steps taken in the course of handling the incident or report. The documentation shall be kept in a confidential file maintained by WPC.
- 5.5. In the event any in-depth investigation becomes necessary, it shall be carried out by DCF and/or appropriate law enforcement personnel and not by church personnel.
- 5.6. WPC will follow and comply with Florida law concerning reporting of abuse. Incidents of abuse that occur or are reasonably believed to have occurred at WPC, and where a child's physical or mental health has been or may be adversely affected, shall be reported to the Florida Department of Children & Families (DCF) or to a local law enforcement agency. The staff person and/or senior pastor shall make a report or verify that a report has been made to the appropriate authorities. Reports to local authorities can be made orally, by telephone, or otherwise. Reports from a person requesting to remain anonymous shall be made by telephone in the presence of a witness of the reporter's own choosing to verify the filing of the oral report. Such a witness may include the WPC staff person directly responsible for the area of ministry involved.
- 5.7. WPC will cooperate with any investigation of the incident by state or local authorities. In the event that there is no investigation of the incident by state or local authorities, the session, acting only in consultation with our insurance company and/or attorney, will then precede to investigate the circumstances of the incident.
- 5.8. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position with children or youth.

- 5.9. Organizations that use WPC facilities that have reporting procedures of their own shall follow those established reporting practices. In addition to following their notification procedures, however, any outside organization that uses WPC facilities shall also notify the WPC senior pastor or designee as soon as possible about any such incident involving any person affiliated with that organization using WPC facilities.
- 5.10. The identity of any person making such a report will, pursuant to Florida law, be kept confidential by the agency or department receiving the report except as provided by law. Such exceptions would include the DCF providing such information to the law enforcement agency investigating the report.
- 5.11. All parties involved in an alleged incident, including the accuser, the accused, and the victim, shall be treated with dignity, support, and love. Confidentiality of all persons involved shall be safeguarded to the fullest possible extent.
- 5.12. The senior pastor shall be the sole spokesperson for the church insofar as media inquiries are concerned. However, where appropriate, the senior pastor and Session may designate another individual to act in such a capacity with regard to a given case. The confidentiality of all persons involved shall be safeguarded to the fullest possible extent.

**PROCEDURES FOR RESPONDING TO  
QUESTIONABLE CONDUCT INVOLVING MINORS**

6. 1. All members of WPC, staff, and other adults participating in programs on the property of WPC are encouraged to be sensitive to the potential for abuse of children and youth. They shall be encouraged not to hesitate to caution others concerning questionable conduct when observed.
  
- 6.2. *Questionable conduct* when observed shall be reported to the WPC staff person directly responsible for the specific area of ministry within which the questionable conduct occurred or to the Senior Pastor. The WPC staff person shall inform the senior pastor of the report. If the report was given to the senior pastor, the senior pastor will inform the WPC staff person of the report.

Adopted: June 21, 2010

