

Child Protection Policy of the Manassas Church of the Brethren

Guidelines for Child Caregivers: "Child Caregivers" include paid and unpaid youth leaders; church nursery volunteers; and teachers of Sunday school, vacation Bible school, children's church, youth activities, and other church-related programs that require adult involvement, including church-related activities that do not occur at the Manassas Church of the Brethren (MCOB). Child Caregivers shall observe the following guidelines:

I. Volunteer Requirements

- A. All volunteers must have attended MCOB for at least 6 months.
- B. At no time is a convicted child abuser or sex offender to be assigned to ministries with children and/or youth.
- C. All volunteers will complete an application that includes questions regarding prior/pending felony convictions or founded/pending child abuse charges. A negative finding will preclude the applicant from volunteering in direct contact with children.
- D. The results of the background checks will be kept in an immovable fire safe, located in a limited access room.
- E. All confidential information will be destroyed via an on-site secured shredding service.
- F. All volunteers working with infants, children, or youth will allow MCOB to conduct a criminal and/or background check at least every 5 years. MCOB will bear the expense of these checks.
- G. All volunteers will be required to read this Child Protection Policy and sign the Volunteer Covenant Agreement, indicating that they have read and understood the policy and agree to abide by it.
- H. First time volunteers will be required to attend one training session related to the Child Protection Policy. Such training shall be completed no later than six months after beginning to volunteer.
- I. It is the responsibility of the Child Protection Coordinator to ensure that a signed Volunteer Covenant Agreement is received from every Volunteer.
- J. Helpers who have not met the expectations of the Child Protection Policy **MUST** serve alongside a volunteer who has.

II. Staff Qualifications

- A. As a part of the application process, two or more character references will be contacted. A negative finding will preclude the applicant from employment in direct contact with children.
- B. All staff members will allow MCOB to conduct a criminal and/or background check at least every 5 years. MCOB will bear the expense of these checks. A felony conviction of a 'barrier crime' as defined in the Code of Virginia Section 63.2-1719 will preclude the applicant from employment.

- C. Before beginning employment, staff members will be required to read this Child Protection Policy and sign the Covenant indicating that they have read and understand the policy and agree to abide by it. A copy of the signed Covenant will be kept in the staff member's personnel file.
- D. Staff will complete a training session related to the Child Protection Policy.

III. Responsibilities

- A. This policy has been adopted by the Manassas Church of the Brethren Congregational Council. Any exceptions and/or changes to these guidelines must have written approval from the Child Protection Coordinator and/or a Pastor.
 - 1. The Education Ministry Team will present the recommendations to the Congregational Council for approval.
 - 2. A Child Protection Coordinator will have oversight of the responsibilities to implement the Child Protection Policy, and report to the Christian Education Team.
 - 3. The Child Protection Coordinator will conduct screening of Child Caregivers and maintain a file including procedures, forms, and related records.
 - 4. The Child Protection Coordinator will establish and maintain a list of recommended Child Caregivers.
 - 5. The Child Protection Coordinator will arrange for Child Protection training for Child Caregivers.

IV. Adult supervision of children

- A. Two Child Caregivers are preferred in the nursery/classroom at all times; however, when only one Child Caregiver is available, the Child Protection Coordinator, or designated representative will randomly check on activities during each session.
- B. Programs will strive to use the following ratios (as maximums), with 2 adults minimum:
 - 1. Birth-16 mos. - 1:4
 - 2. 16 mos.-2 years - 1:5
 - 3. 2 year olds - 1:8
 - 4. 3-5 yrs. - 1:10
 - 5. Grade K-5 - 1:15
 - 6. Grade 6-12 - 1:20
- C. Youth, 11 to 17 years of age, may participate in the supervision of infant, toddler, and preschool children when working under the supervision of an adult in compliance.
- D. Without prior notice, parents/guardians and staff or volunteers may visit classrooms or childcare rooms.
- E. All doors to rooms utilized for children's and youth activities shall have a window or door with a window. If not feasible, the door shall remain open during all sessions.
- F. Diapering/changing areas are to be in prominent view.
- G. Any one-to-one conversations or counseling with a child or youth during age-group activities should always occur in a public place in the sight of others never alone in a car or private room with the door shut.

- H. Coordinators or Volunteers may not meet privately with a child or youth outside of the age-group activity without parental or guardian permission.
- I. We do not discourage physical contact with children, however, it should be appropriate physical contact. (Brief hugs, pat on the back, consoling a crying child, holding an infant or preschooler in your lap, etc.)
- J. Conversations between volunteers and children should be of a positive and appropriate nature to the youth and child. It is considered inappropriate to discuss personal information, relationships, dating, or sexual activities.
- K. Driving alone with a child or youth should be avoided unless it is with parental permission or in an emergency.

V. Releasing Children

- A. Infant, toddler, and preschool children will be released only to a parent or guardian or the adult designated by a parent or guardian.

VI. Discipline

- A. Teachers/leaders of all activities involving children will follow specific steps to maintain a safe learning environment. Teachers/leaders shall:
 - 1. Have reasonable expectations of children's behavior.
 - 2. Communicate expectations of appropriate behavior to the children and encourage appropriate behavior in clear, simple statements.
 - 3. It is the Coordinators or Volunteer's responsibility to support a child's "no" (verbal or non-verbal), regarding physical contact, whether it is directed toward another child or an adult, unless the child's safety is endangered. Ensure that "no" is respected.
 - 4. Respond to misbehavior appropriately using techniques such as reminders, and redirecting. If necessary, teachers/leaders will enforce consequences that are appropriate for the situation. Children will not be harmed physically or emotionally. Teachers/leaders will not use shouting or yelling, ridicule, name-calling, sarcasm, embarrassment, bribes, threats, withholding food or any form of physical punishment. Disciplinary concerns should be reported to the parent or guardian of the child or youth.
- B. Any time that appropriate techniques have not succeeded in maintaining a safe, productive atmosphere for the rest of the children, the parent/guardian shall be notified and will assist with immediate situation needs.

VII. Confidentiality

- A. Children, especially young children, have not yet developed a sense of judgment about the difference between information that can be shared about their families or information that properly stays within the family. This information should remain confidential.
- B. Teachers/leaders will respect the dignity, worth and uniqueness of each individual child and their families. When there is reason to believe a child's welfare is at risk, it may be necessary to share confidential information with agency representatives who have legal responsibility for intervening on the child's behalf.

VIII. Child Abuse

- A. Under Virginia law Section 63.1-248.2, an abused child is defined as one whose parents or other persons responsible for his/her care creates or inflicts, or threatens to create or inflict, or allows to be created or inflicted upon such a child a physical or mental injury by other than accidental means, or creates a substantial risk of death or disfigurement, or impairment of bodily or mental functions. This includes the following: failure to provide care necessary for health, abandonment, commits or allows sexual exploitation, is endangered or neglected. Child abuse may be physical, sexual, emotional or mental, and may be the result of actions or omissions to act (e.g., lack of care for a child).
- B. The legal requirement adopted by the church for staff and volunteers for reporting child abuse is found in the Code of Virginia § 63.1-248.3. It states that persons “who, in their professional or official capacity, have reason to suspect that a child is an abused or neglected child, shall report the matter immediately...to the local department of the county or city wherein the child resides or wherein the abuse or neglect is believed to have occurred or to the Department of Social Services' toll-free child abuse and neglect hotline.” “Any report is confidential and the person making the report is immune from liability for making such a report, unless it is proven that such a person acted in bad faith or with malicious intent.”
- C. All allegations of child abuse will be treated seriously. Should there be allegations of child abuse involving children in programs at the church, the following course of action will be followed:
 1. Responsibility of persons who witness or suspect child abuse
 - a) In cases of an emergency where there is an immediate threat to a child, volunteer, or coordinator, call 911.
 - b) Child abuse concerns shall be reported to the Child Protection Coordinator and/or Pastor.
 - c) The Child Protection Coordinator will directly inform and/or provide procedures for reporting suspicious acts. Each report shall require a written statement by the Child Caregiver to the Child Protection Coordinator. The Child Protection Coordinator will work with the Pastor and Christian Education Chairperson to begin the response action. All reports will be maintained in a confidential file at the MCOB.
 - d) All information regarding the matter will remain confidential.
 2. Responsibility of Pastor:
 - a) The Pastor will immediately notify the local Child Protective Services agency who will be the designated investigating body in the matter, although it may involve other departments as needed. Other members of the Ministerial Team will be notified immediately, provided the allegation is not against them

- b) Confidentiality of identities for both the alleged victim and the accused will be maintained.
- c) If the accused has assigned duties within the life of the church that person must be temporarily relieved of duties until the investigation is concluded. The details of the allegation will not be discussed by members with the accused.
- d) All procedures followed in the handling of the allegation will be documented.
- e) Parents/guardians will be notified immediately, provided the allegation is not against them.
- f) The District Executive will be notified.
- g) If the allegation is against a member of the Ministerial Team, in addition to reporting the allegation to the Virginia Department of Social Services, the church's insurance company will be notified immediately.
- h) Pastoral care will be offered. If pastoral care is provided to the principals (alleged victim and accused) and their families, a Pastor shall under no circumstances be drawn into a discussion of the truth or falsity of allegations that could contaminate the investigation. The Pastor shall not assign blame or take any steps that involve establishing or refuting the allegation.
- i) Only the Pastor is to be the official spokespersons for any communication with the media. All other persons involved in the incident will be instructed not to speak with the media at any time.

IX. Sexual Harassment

- A. "Sexual harassment" is defined as unwanted and unwelcome behavior of a sexual nature which interferes with a child's right to participate in activities in a comfortable and supportive atmosphere. Under federal laws (Title IX Education Amendments of 1972 and Title VII 1964 Civil Rights Act), sexual harassment is illegal.
- B. Sexual harassment may include, but is not limited to, sexually oriented jokes or humor, sexually demeaning comments, verbal suggestions of sexual involvement or sexual activity, insulting comments about sexual orientation, questions or comments about sexual behavior, unwelcome or inappropriate physical contact, graphic or degrading comments about an individual's physical appearance, expressed or implied sexual advances or propositions, display of sexually suggestive advances or propositions, and/or repeated requests of an individual for social engagements after an individual refuses such social engagements. Some of these activities may be considered sexual abuse when involving an adult or older youth with a child or youth. The Pastor will contact the local Child Protective Services for assistance when there is a question.
- C. Staff and volunteers will ensure that all children have the opportunity to participate in activities in a supportive and comfortable (non-hostile) atmosphere. Staff and

volunteers will receive training in sexual harassment prevention. Teachers/leaders, staff and volunteers will carefully monitor interactions among children.

- D. The teacher/leader will make appropriate and timely response to allegations of sexual harassment. A child who exhibits inappropriate behavior of a sexual nature toward another child shall be corrected immediately and the situation reported to the parents/guardians. The Pastor will work with teachers/leaders and parents/guardians to ensure that the behavior does not continue. If an allegation of sexual harassment is made against an adult volunteer or staff member, the Pastor shall be notified immediately.
 1. If the appropriate response for the alleged behavior is a reminder or explanation of appropriate behavior, the Pastor will have a conference with the alleged harasser. This conference will be documented in a confidential file.
 2. For a more serious concern, the Pastor will contact the District Executive for assistance.
 3. The Pastor, the Child Protection Coordinator, and the Christian Education Chairperson will investigate the matter in as quick a time as possible. The investigation will be documented and kept in a confidential file along with any supporting evidence. They will keep the matter strictly confidential. In determining whether alleged conduct constitutes sexual harassment, they will look at the totality of the circumstances, such as the nature of the inappropriate behavior and the context in which the alleged incidents occurred.

X. Health Procedures

- A. Training for volunteers will include appropriate techniques for hand washing before and after serving food, diapering and using the bathroom.
- B. Toys with which infants, toddlers and preschool children come in contact will be sanitized on a regular basis.
- C. In any situations where body fluids are present, staff and volunteers have been trained in use of universal procedures to prevent spread of infection. Disposable gloves are available with first aid kits and in all classrooms.
- D. Before serving any food, the Emergency Contact and Treatment Waiver shall be checked. Safe food handling procedures will be used.
- E. Staff and volunteers will be alert to symptoms of communicable diseases in children involved in programs. Parents/guardians of children who show symptoms of illness such as fever and vomiting will be asked to take them home. If parents/guardians are not present, the child will be isolated until parents/guardians arrive.
- F. Teachers/leaders will inform parents/guardians when there is an incident that results in a child having broken skin, redness or bruising, or swelling or when emotional or physical pain is indicated by a child.
- G. Children should be free of fever and vomiting for at least 24 hours before participating in any church function/activity.

XI. Children's Emergency Contact and Treatment Waiver

- A. Whenever children are in attendance at activities and parent/guardians are not on site at the same time, a waiver must be on file and available to volunteers and staff.
- B. Parents/guardians will indicate on the waiver whether or not they will allow photographs of their children to be taken. Photographs may be used for news articles and promotional materials. For safety reasons, it is the policy of the Church of the Brethren never to use last names and locations to identify photographs of minors on the internet.
- C. If a photograph appears that you would like removed, contact the Child Protection Coordinator and/or Communications Team Leader, and the item will be removed immediately.

XII. Emergency Procedures

- A. All classrooms will be provided with instructions to follow in case of an emergency. All volunteers and staff will be informed of the location of those instructions.
- B. All leaders/teachers, staff and program leaders will be informed of the location of fire alarm, telephone, fire extinguishers, and evacuation maps.
- C. Each section of the facility is equipped with a first aid kit. All volunteers and staff will be informed of the location of the kits.

XIII. Field Trips

- A. Parents/guardian must have a signed waiver on file with emergency information.
- B. Parents/guardians will always be supplied with itineraries, mode of transportation, contact information and supervision plans.
- C. For all trips the church office will have copies of children's records and detailed trip plans. Copies of children's records will also be carried in each vehicle.
- D. Adults will be available for supervision in accordance with the staffing ratios described above.
- E. All drivers must hold a valid driver's license and car insurance. They must obey all traffic laws and enforce the correct use of seatbelts for all passengers.

Resources used in creating this policy include:

- Commonwealth of Virginia, Department of Social Services. Minimum Standards for Licensed Child Day Care Centers
- Code of Virginia
- Fairfax County Child Protective Services
- Commitment to Children Policy of the United Christian Parish of Reston
- Mid-Atlantic District Church of the Brethren Child Protection/Risk Management Policy
- Annville Church of the Brethren Child Protection Policy