

Covenant United Presbyterian Church



CHILD/YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY

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Background

Covenant United Presbyterian Church is committed to the spiritual nurture of the children and families in its fold as they grow to love and serve Jesus Christ. To facilitate such nurture and growth we must create safe spaces and safe relationships for that development. It is part of our baptismal promise.

Also, we join the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in the commitment to protect the children in our care. The following resources are developed from best practices from churches and child-welfare agencies around the country and are in compliance with PA State Child Protective Service/Mandatory Reporting Laws as of September, 2015.

Purpose:

The purpose of this policy is to demonstrate our commitment to the physical and emotional safety, and spiritual growth of the children, youth, and adults that serve these communities. These policies apply to all programs involving children and youth while in our buildings or on the grounds of Covenant United Presbyterian Church, or while participating or serving in an off-site event or trip sponsored by Covenant United Presbyterian Church.

Definitions:

Term	Definition
"child" or children	Any person(s) under the age of 18.
"adult"	Anyone 18 years of age or older.
"child abuse" (as defined under Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Law)	"(i) Any recent act or failure to act by a perpetrator which causes non-accidental serious physical injury to a child under 18 years of age. (ii) An act or failure to act by a perpetrator which causes non-accidental serious mental injury to or sexual abuse or sexual exploitation of a child under 18 years of age. (iii) Any recent act, failure to act or series of acts or failures to act by a perpetrator which creates an imminent risk of serious physical injury to or sexual abuse or sexual exploitation of a child under 18 years of age. (iv) Serious physical neglect by a perpetrator constituting prolonged or repeated lack of supervision or the failure to provide essentials of life, including adequate medical care, which endangers a child's life or development or impairs the child's functioning."
"children's activities"	Any activity or program in which children are under supervision of staff persons or volunteers.
"youth activities"	Any activity or program specifically for children in grades 6 through 12. However, youth are still considered children for the purposes of this policy.
"staff person"	Any person employed by Covenant United Presbyterian Church.
"volunteer"	A person 18 years of age or older, unpaid, who assists with the care, supervision, or guidance of children or who routinely interacts with children as a part of a church activity under the supervision of staff.
"helper"	A helper is defined as any person between the ages of 12 and 17 who serves in a volunteer role. These helpers will be supervised by two cleared adults.

Employees and Volunteers

Screening Procedure for Covenant United Presbyterian Church Staff and Volunteers:

- 1) Staff persons: All staff persons shall be required to complete and provide:
 - A written application and references, as well as a personal interview
 - Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance through the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services
 - Pennsylvania State Police Criminal Record Check
 - FBI Criminal History Report
 - Documentation of required online or in-person Mandated Reporter Training using a course from the list of approved courses provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services
 - Signed Participation Covenant Agreement
- 2) All Volunteers: All volunteers who, as part of any program, activity or service at Covenant United Presbyterian Church, accept responsibility for a child's welfare or have direct contact with children (except in cases where a volunteer is assisting at least two cleared adults) shall be required to complete and provide:
 - Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance through the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare
 - Pennsylvania State Police Criminal Record Check
 - FBI Criminal History Report – this step requires fingerprints.
 - If a volunteer has lived in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania consecutively for the last 10 years, a notarized affidavit is acceptable.
 - Signed Participation Covenant Agreement, including information on mandated reporters of child abuse.

All volunteers and staff persons who, as part of a regularly scheduled program, activity or service, accept responsibility for a child or have direct contact with children shall be required to either demonstrate an active relationship with Covenant United Presbyterian Church or must be well known to a Covenant member prior to serving in a supervisory role in children or youth activities. In the case of new staff hires, references deemed adequate by the Lead Pastor will suffice. In the case of outside scouting or other nonprofit groups, at least one group leader shall be required to maintain an active ongoing relationship with Covenant United Presbyterian Church, and all volunteers for such organizations must have clearances on file at the church office.

Background checks must be repeated every 5 years.

Individuals may request reimbursement of the expenses incurred while obtaining clearances. Please contact the church office or a pastor for assistance.

All volunteers must be at least five (5) years older than the children/youth with whom they are working. Helpers must be supervised by two cleared adults. Hired staff may be closer in age.

Working with Children

Supervision

In order to provide a safe haven and not jeopardize our ministries, the following procedures are required.

- 1) A minimum of two unrelated adult staff and/or volunteers will be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during programs and activities at or sponsored by Covenant United Presbyterian Church. This may include the presence of an adult “roamer” who moves in and out of rooms, provided all doors remain open, and the children are above the age of four.
- 2) Each room or space where children are being cared for will have a window in the door or the door will be left open. All activities should occur in open view. Should the children’s activity be an outdoor program or occur in a setting which makes it difficult to comply with this Policy, the staff person in charge of the activity shall take appropriate measures to make sure that the setting suits the activity, and the children are properly supervised.
- 3) Overnight activities require at least two adults of each gender when both girls and boys are present. Leaders must assure that the children/youth are given appropriate privacy in areas of sleeping, changing and bathing.
- 4) Scouting and similar organizational activities that take place away from Covenant United Presbyterian Church are expected to comply with their own rules and regulations. The Church will not be held liable for any activities that take place elsewhere. Those activities within the church will comply with this policy.

In certain situations requiring one-on-one mentoring, a child/youth may be with one adult in a public space (such as a common area in the church, an ice cream parlor, restaurant, or public lobby) with the written permission of the child/youth’s parent/guardian. The adult will not individually transport the child/youth to the meeting location. The adult should notify a Covenant staff person prior to the meeting with the time and location of the meeting.

Discipline Policy

It is the policy of Covenant United Presbyterian Church not to administer corporal punishment, even if parents give permission for it. There will be no spanking, hitting, or other physical discipline toward children. Adults will speak to children/youth and one another in a constructive and respectful manner.

Sick Child Policy

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all the children at Covenant United Presbyterian Church. Parents are encouraged to be considerate of other children when deciding whether to place a child under our care. In general, children with symptoms of fever, diarrhea, vomiting, green/yellow runny nose, eye or skin infections, or other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease should not be dropped off.

Children who are observed by our staff or volunteers to be ill will be separated from other children and the parent or guardian will be contacted to request the child be picked up.

Medications Policy

It is the policy of Covenant United Presbyterian Church not to administer either prescription or non-prescription medication to the children under our care. Medications should be administered by a parent at home. Exceptions to the medication policy may be granted in the case of life-saving medications such

as an Epi Pen, inhaler, or glucose tab with Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Emergency Care Plan (available in Church office) signed by a parent/guardian. These medications must be in their original container.

In the case of overnight events the medication policy will be modified so that children and youth can receive their medication. Prescriptions must be in their original bottles, with a written and signed Authorization to Give Medication Form (available in Church office), before being provided to the adult in charge of the trip. The adult in charge of the trip must document when medication is given in a medication log. School age children may self-administer medication with parental/guardian consent, but medication must still be given to the adult in charge of the trip. Over-the-counter remedies such as aspirin may be administered by a trip leader with signed parental/guardian consent.

All medications shall be provided by parents/guardians.

Confidentiality of Medical Information

Information regarding the medical conditions of children is confidential and is only made available to the adults responsible for care of children/youth when it impacts care. In the event information about a contagious illness needs to be shared with others who may have been unknowingly exposed to a sick child, the confidentiality of the children and families will be observed.

Restroom Guidelines

All children through age 11 should utilize a classroom bathroom if one is available. If a classroom bathroom is not available, the staff person or volunteer or helper should escort the child(ren) to a hallway bathroom. The staff person or volunteer should use their own discretion to determine whether it is appropriate for the child(ren) to use the restroom at that particular time. If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, the staff person or volunteer or helper should open the bathroom door and call the child's name. If the child requires assistance, the worker should prop open the bathroom door and leave the stall open as he/she assists the child.

For children age 5 through age 11, the staff person or volunteer may choose to allow two children to accompany one another to the restroom if the restroom is located within sight.

Whenever possible, a staff person or volunteer of the same gender as the child in question should take the child to the restroom. For the protection of all, staff persons or volunteers should never be alone with a child in a bathroom with the door closed and never be in a closed bathroom stall with a child. Parents are strongly encouraged to have children visit the bathroom prior to dropping them off for a class or program.

Diapers will be changed in the designated nursery location in the presence of other childcare workers. Diapers may be changed by adult staff persons, adult volunteers, or family members aged 12 and above of the child in question. Steps for hand hygiene and cleaning and disinfecting the changing table will be followed according to the posted signs.

Transportation of Children/Youth

Children/youth may be transported off-site as part of a church sponsored activity provided there is prior written consent from a parent/guardian (most often in the form of a permission slip), and an up-to-date participant health form is kept with a responsible adult leader on the trip at all times.

Parents and volunteers who are providing transportation must be at least 21 years of age, provide a copy of his/her driver's license, and proof of insurance for the vehicle being used in addition to the Commonwealth required clearances noted earlier in this policy.

Reporting Suspected Child Abuse

Forms are available in the Church office.

In Pennsylvania, the Child Protective Services Law (CPSL) defines the individuals who qualify as mandated reporters of child abuse. People in the following positions will be defined as mandated reporters:

1. Clergy members, including ministers and other spiritual leaders
2. An individual, paid or unpaid, who on the basis of the individual's role as an integral part of a regularly scheduled program, activity or service, accepts responsibility for a child. These individuals include those serving at youth camps or programs, sports or athletic programs, outreach programs, enrichment programs, troops, clubs, or similar organizations.

When an incident of child abuse occurs or an allegation of an incident within the church or at a church event off-premise is made or an employee or volunteer otherwise has reasonable cause to suspect child abuse, it is crucial that it be dealt with immediately and in a clearly outlined manner.

1. If a staff person or volunteer has reasonable cause to suspect, based upon their training and experience, that a child is a victim of child abuse, the staff person or volunteer **shall immediately contact the Pennsylvania Childline and Abuse Registry (1-800-932-0313)**. Initial reports can also be filed via the website: compass.dhs.pa.gov/cwis
2. This includes situations where:
 - a. A staff person or volunteer comes into contact with a child that has been abused;
 - b. An individual makes a specific disclosure to a staff person or volunteer that an identifiable child is the victim of child abuse; or
 - c. An individual 14 years of age or older makes a specific disclosure that he/she has committed child abuse.
3. A volunteer may ask an appropriate staff person to be present while the call is being placed however, the volunteer is legally responsible for contacting Childline by telephone. Staff persons may not influence the decision as to whether or not the incident should be reported, but may help in providing the name, address, and family information of the alleged victim.
4. After a report is made, the volunteer shall notify the staff person in charge of the activity if he or she has not already done so.
5. The staff person in charge of the activity will immediately notify the Lead Pastor if he or she has not already done so.

Any incidences involving Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, or an outside group using the church facility, must, in addition to the statutorily-required reporting, be reported to the Lead Pastor.

Individuals under investigation will be required to refrain from all childcare/supervisory activities until the incident report is resolved. If the removal of any person from an activity is required, care should be taken to handle this in a discreet manner, recognizing that an investigation is still being conducted.

The following procedure shall then be followed under the direction of the pastors if the accused is an employee or volunteer of Covenant United Presbyterian Church.

1. The Presbytery of Donegal may be notified, along with the insurance company and an incident report will be filed.
2. The Session will comply with the Commonwealth's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law dictates and cooperate with any investigation by the Commonwealth or local authorities. In the event there is not an investigation by the Commonwealth or local authorities, a team may be formed to investigate the circumstances of the incident, acting only in accordance with the Presbytery of Donegal, the PC (USA) Book of Order and the insurance company reporting requirement.
3. During an active investigation, any individuals accused of inappropriate contact with a child will be removed from any situations of contact while the investigation continues. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position with children/youth.
4. The pastors or designee will be the spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect unless he/she is involved. All other staff/volunteers should refrain from speaking to the media. Pastors should be aware of Pastor-Penitent privilege in all situations, especially when speaking to the media.

Other Policies

Other Groups Using Covenant United Presbyterian Church Facilities

All those who, as part of a regularly scheduled program, activity or service, accept responsibility for a child or have regular direct contact with children while assisting with Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, as well as independent programs or groups' activities held at Covenant United Presbyterian Church will be required to complete and provide to the local church leaders:

- Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance through the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services
- Pennsylvania State Police Criminal Record Check
- FBI Criminal History Report – this step requires fingerprints.
 - If a volunteer has lived in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania consecutively for the last 10 years, a notarized affidavit is acceptable.
- Signed Participation Covenant Agreement

These groups shall be required to complete and provide Covenant United Presbyterian Church with a signed Facility Use Policy. They shall also develop and abide by policies consistent with the requirements of this policy and accompanying procedures.

All information will be kept confidential. Paper copies will be kept in a locked file on the church premises.

Responsibilities/Administration of Policy

Oversight of the policy: The children and youth committees have oversight of this policy and are responsible for insuring that the policy is followed, including adequate training for staff and volunteers on this policy.

Record keeping: The personnel chair and/or his/her designated representative such as an administrative assistant will keep accurate, current, and confidential information concerning certification and training records of individuals who may work with children. Clearances and records will be kept on file under lock or passkey.