

## CHILDREN AND YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY

***“Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” ~ Mark 10:13-16\_***

### **Policy Purpose**

The Presbytery of Susquehanna Valley (PSV) is committed to providing an environment that is a safe place for children and youth and that is designed to protect them from any abuse when they are involved in presbytery-related activities. PSV adopts these policies and procedures not only to maximize safety and prevent child abuse from occurring within its community, but also to guide and protect volunteers and employees from unwarranted allegations of child abuse.

### **Terms and Definitions**

**Child Abuse** - An act committed by a parent, caregiver, or person in a position of trust (even though he or she may not care for the child on a daily basis) which is not accidental and which harms or threatens harm to a child’s physical or mental health or welfare. Types of abuse may include physical abuse, including physical injury or threat of injury; physical neglect, such as failure to provide necessary care to a child; sexual abuse; mental abuse or neglect; emotional abuse; and spiritual abuse. Child abuse includes, but is not limited to:

- **Neglect of Basic Needs** - A form of abuse. Denial of food, water, cleanliness, clothing, and sleep are not appropriate means of discipline.
- **Physical Abuse** - Any physical force applied by an adult or older youth in a position of care or authority to a child, youth, or vulnerable adult. Physical force (hitting, spanking, shaking, shoving, etc.) is not to be used by leaders in our programs.
- **Sexual Abuse** – Any sexual contact or sexual interaction between a child (under the age of eighteen years) and an adult; any use of a child for the sexual simulation of an adult, a third person, or the child; any risqué jokes, innuendo, unacceptable visual contact, unwelcome casual touch, unwelcome and inappropriate hugs and kisses, and sexually suggestive pictures between an adult and a child, as deemed inappropriate by any reasonable adult. Even if a child, youth, or vulnerable adult, out of ignorance, innocence, or fear does not resist, it is still abuse.
- **Emotional Abuse** - Inappropriately belittling, hateful, or angry words and/or actions directed toward a child, youth, or vulnerable adult. Discipline by humiliation is also emotional abuse.
- **Spiritual Abuse**- Using religious references to shame or by guilt to motivate a child into a particular action or behavior.

**Employee** – Any person who works for salary or wages at the Presbytery of Susquehanna Valley (PSV).

**Volunteer** – Any person not employed by PSV who, at any time during the year, teaches, supervises, or helps with children and youth activities, or is in the presence of children or youth. These activities include, but not limited to, Nursery, Childcare, Summer Camps & Conferences, Children & Youth mission trips, Fellowship events, and any Presbytery sponsored events hosted at any of our member churches.

**Leader** – An adult designated by PSV or by a sponsoring organization to have responsibility for children and/or youth. The adult must be a minimum of 18 years of age. Leaders of overnight trips must be at least 21 years of age. It is suggested that leaders be a minimum of four years older than the children or youth they are supervising.

**Presbytery-Sponsored Activity** - Includes any and all gatherings that arise from any worship, educational, childcare, fellowship, administrative, pastoral, mission or recreational event generated or organized by PSV, whether at any of our member churches or, off-campus.

**Volunteer Ministry** – Includes any Presbytery-sponsored activity engaged in by a volunteer.

**Child or Youth** – Persons under 18 years old and considered a minor under the law. This term shall also include legally incompetent persons.

## **Screening**

### **Staff: *Background Requirements***

Applicants for full-time or part-time paid employment at PSV will be required to provide, complete or undergo the following:

- An Employment Application which will include information regarding past employment and prior convictions for crimes;
- A specific statement that the individual has no prior conviction for child abuse or sexual misconduct; and
- A reference check covering, where possible, the two immediate past employers, or personal references unrelated to the applicant if no information can be obtained from past employers.
- Prior to hiring an applicant, PSV will obtain a criminal record report for that individual.
- Upon being hired, each new employee will be required to sign an acknowledgement that he or she has received a copy of the PSV Child & Youth Protection Policy, understands it and will comply with its terms.
- Each new employee will be provided orientation and training on child abuse, including its recognition and prevention, as well as on the terms and conditions of this policy.

Applicants having any convictions for offenses which may negatively influence children or youth, may be denied employment. Each case will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis on its own merit.

### **Other Compensated Individuals: *Background Requirements***

Applicants for full-time or part-time paid employment at PSV will be required to provide, complete or undergo the following:

- An Employment Application which will include information regarding past employment and prior convictions for crimes;
- A specific statement that the individual has no prior conviction for child abuse or sexual misconduct; and
- A reference check covering, where possible, the two immediate past employers, or personal references unrelated to the applicant if no information can be obtained from past employers.
- Prior to hiring an applicant, PSV will obtain a criminal record report for that individual.
- Upon being hired, each new employee will be required to sign an acknowledgement that he or she has received a copy of the PSV Child & Youth Protection Policy, understands it and will comply with its terms.
- Each new employee will be provided orientation and training on child abuse, including its recognition and prevention, as well as on the terms and conditions of this policy.

Applicants having any convictions for offenses which may negatively influence children or youth, may be denied employment. Each case will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis on its own merit.

### **Volunteers: *Background Requirements***

Volunteers working with youth or children of the presbytery in any volunteer ministry, will be required to provide, complete or undergo the following:

- A Volunteer Ministry Application which will include information regarding past employment and prior convictions for crimes;
- A specific statement that the individual has no prior conviction for child abuse or sexual misconduct; and
- Prior to becoming a volunteer, PSV will obtain a background check for that individual.
- Each new volunteer, prior to beginning any volunteer role, will be required to sign an acknowledgement that he or she has received a copy of the PSV Child & Youth Protection Policy, understands it, and will comply with its terms.
- Each new volunteer will be provided orientation and training on child abuse, including its recognition and prevention, as well as on the terms and conditions of this policy.

Applicants having any convictions for offenses which may negatively influence children or youth, may be denied employment. Each case will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis on its own merit.

## **General Procedures**

### **Supervision: *Two-Leader/Open-Door Policy***

Whenever possible, any adult who is present in a presbytery-sponsored activity for children or youth should be accompanied by another adult. PSV employees and volunteers should not, during a PSV program, be alone with a single child where they cannot be observed by others.

In order to avoid situations where an individual is alone in a room with children, all children's and youth activities should be supervised by at least two adult leaders. Whenever possible, these adults should be unrelated. The presence of two leaders is to protect children and youth against situations in which abuse might occur, and to protect leaders against false allegations of abuse or neglect.

Classrooms, childcare rooms, and any area in which programs for children or youth are taking place may be visited without prior notice by church staff, parents, or other volunteer church workers. No windows may ever be totally blocked so as to prevent visual observation into the classroom.

In the event that two leaders cannot be present in the room, such that one leader is alone in a room with one or more children or youth, a door or half-door from the room must be left open. The leader should not position himself or herself in the room such that other adults passing in the hallway cannot see him or her.

Furthermore, at any counseling session with children or youth, the door or half-door of the room used must remain open for the entire session. The session should be conducted at a time when others are nearby, even if they are not within listening distance.

Each classroom for children and youth should ideally have a door with an observation window or a half- door, such that the upper half may be kept open. If it does not, and two leaders are not present in the room, then the door must remain open at all times.

### **Parental/Guardian Consent**

Children and youth must obtain parental or guardian permission for involvement in presbytery-sponsored activities or programs that involve travel.

### **“Six Month” Rule for Volunteers**

A volunteer must be a member of PSV or a PSV church, or have regularly attended a PSV church, for six months before working with youth or children. This requirement does not apply to paid staff or volunteers involved in activities in which their own children are present. The Christian Education Committee or the Director of Christian Education shall have the authority to waive this six-month rule upon request, where appropriate.

## **Policy Review**

The provisions of this Policy shall be reviewed annually by the Personnel Committee. Any proposed changes to the Policy will be brought to the attention of the Cabinet for its input, if any, and the Presbytery, prior to any such changes becoming final. The Personnel Committee shall report periodically to the Cabinet and recommend any changes deemed appropriate.

## **Code of Conduct**

1. Staff, PSV Pastors, and volunteers are required to adhere to the PSV Child Protection Policy guidelines in all their interactions with children and youth.
2. Staff and volunteers will respect children's rights not to be touched in ways that make them feel uncomfortable or that disregard their right to say no.
3. Staff and volunteers may not discipline children by use of physical punishment, by failing to provide the necessities of care, or by any other method defined as Child Abuse in this document.
4. Physical restraint is used only in situations necessary to protect the child, or others.
5. While supervising children and youth participating in PSV programs, staff and volunteers should know where participants are at all times.
6. Restroom supervision: Whenever possible, volunteers will make sure any restroom used is not occupied by any suspicious or unknown individual before allowing children or youth to use the facilities. Always send children in pairs with a volunteer. In the case of young children, the staff person or volunteer, will stand in the outer doorway while children are using the restroom. This policy allows privacy for the children and protection for the staff person or volunteer (not being alone with a child). Staff and volunteers shall strongly encourage parents to take children to the restroom whenever possible.
7. Diapering and potty training should be done primarily by parents or guardians, and if needed, by staff members/paid caregivers. Staff or volunteers may be asked to help in certain situations and should follow posted nursery guidelines when performing diapering.
8. Staff and volunteers should be alert to the physical and emotional state of children. Any signs of injury or possible child abuse must be reported according to the PSV Child Protection Policy.
9. Staff and volunteers are discouraged from being alone with children or youth without parental permission.
10. Under no circumstances should volunteers release children to anyone other than the authorized parent, guardian, or other individual authorized by the parent or guardian.
11. Consuming, using, possessing, or being under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs while working or volunteering with children or youth is prohibited.
12. Being impaired by legally prescribed drugs while working or volunteering with children or youth is prohibited.
13. Possessing or using concealed weapons or firearms while working or volunteering with children or youth is prohibited.

14. Smoking or use of tobacco *in the presence of* children, youth, or parents while working or volunteering is prohibited.
15. Staff and volunteers should not release children to any adult or family member, including older siblings, other than the child's parent/guardian unless prior verbal permission has been obtained from the parent.
16. Profanity, inappropriate jokes and media, sharing intimate details of one's personal life, and any kind of harassment in the presence of children, youth, or parents are prohibited.
17. Staff and volunteers will be mindful of the content on any portable electronic device, social networking pages, or other electronic media that might be accessible to any children and youth.
18. Staff and volunteer adult and youth leaders shall wear appropriate dress when volunteering with children and/or youth.
19. Movies used in all church settings shall meet the voluntary movie rating system guidelines established by the Motion Picture Association of America for age-appropriate content.
20. Staff and volunteers may not date or be romantically involved with program participants or church members who are younger than 18 years of age.
21. Staff and volunteers are required to read, sign, and adhere to all policies related to identifying, documenting, and reporting child abuse and will attend training sessions on the subject.
22. Staff and volunteers are required to report any concerns or suspicions regarding their observations of any individual's interaction with a child. Except for concerns related to alleged or potential abuse, which require specific immediate reports, these concerns may be reported to the individual. If the concerns are not alleviated by a change in the individual's behavior, a second report must be made to the reporting person. In PSV, the reporting person is the Presbytery's Stated Clerk and if not available or appropriate, then the current Presbytery Moderator.
23. If it is necessary for an adult to take a child or youth home after an event, all staff and volunteers shall abide by safe driving laws when transporting children or youth. An effort should be made to contact the family and inform them of the situation before transporting the child or youth. It is always advisable for leaders to give parents advance notice and full information regarding the event in which their child or youth will be participating.
24. In the event that a one-on-one child/youth to adult scenario arises, i.e., unexpected transportation needs, confirmation mentoring, or otherwise, parent permission should be granted in writing or by phone when possible. It is preferred to have mentors and confirmands meet in pairs or to meet in public places.

## **Reporting Reporting Incidents**

Any individual who observes or becomes aware of any alleged or potential incident of child abuse must, as soon as possible, report the matter to the staff member in charge of the program, the Stated Clerk, the Moderator, or the Chair of Personnel. Because of the importance of proper reporting, pastors, employees, Session members, and persons highly visible to church members and visitors should understand the terms of the policy and be ready to help direct any such reports or allegations to the appropriate persons.

## **Investigation**

Upon receipt of a report or allegation of child abuse at PSV, the Stated Clerk, Chair of Personnel, or Moderator shall ensure that an appropriate investigation is commenced and appropriate procedures are followed as required by New York State law. The process will include documenting all steps undertaken in handling the investigation, and a Report of Suspected Child Abuse form (Appendix B) shall be completed.

## **Confidentiality**

All investigations shall be conducted in as confidential a manner as is compatible with a thorough investigation of the report or allegation.

## **Parental Notification**

If an incident has occurred during a presbytery-sponsored event, the parents of any minor involved in any allegation of abuse shall be immediately notified.

## **Potential Responses**

Upon any report of potential or alleged child abuse by an employee or volunteer of PSV, any individual accused of such conduct may be temporarily relieved of any duties involving youth or children pending an appropriate investigation.

## **Off-Site Trips & Events**

### **Permission Forms**

Parent/Guardian Permission Forms and Medical Consent Forms must be completed prior to all trips. The two-adult rule must be followed throughout the trip with any foreseeable exceptions clearly stated and approved in advance by the parent or guardian. The total number of adults on each trip will be adjusted according to the requirements of the planned activities. Under no circumstances may one adult alone take or accompany minors on an overnight outing.

## **Rooming Arrangements**

- Rooming arrangements should provide for children and youth of the same sex to room together and adults of the same sex to room together.
- When possible, adults' rooms shall be next to youth rooms and youth may be checked on during the night.

- Ordinarily, adults should not share rooms with children. An individual minor may share a room with an individual adult if the two are related (parent/child), or if written permission has been granted prior to the event by a parent or guardian (in such cases as Intergenerational Mission Trips).
- In situations where one large sleeping area is provided, two adults of the same sex shall accompany children or youth of the same sex.
- The needs of Trans-gender children will be accommodated on a case-by-case basis.

### **Medical**

- Each child, youth, adult volunteer, and staff must submit a completed medical/insurance form. Each minor's forms must have a parent or guardian's signature.
- Whenever possible, all activities with children and youth shall have a staff or volunteer adult leader with current-certification first aid/CPR training.
- Group leaders should have a copy of all medical forms for overnight or off-site events. These forms will be kept on the event site for the duration of the event.
- First Aid supplies will be available on the event site. All workers will be informed of the location of First Aid supplies/equipment and shall have access to information concerning specific medical conditions and concerns of participants.
- A written report will be completed in the case of any accident, medical emergency or injury.

### **Driving Rules/Travel**

- As recommended by our insurance company, it is suggested that all drivers of children and youth be over 21 and under 65. In situations where this is not possible, parent permission shall be obtained before the trip and vehicles shall travel together.
- When one vehicle is used for an event, the two-leader rule still applies unless parental permission is obtained prior to the trip. When several vehicles are taken for an event and two leaders are not available for every vehicle, keeping the other vehicle in sight at regular intervals is an acceptable substitution for the two-leader rule. When one vehicle is used for an event, the two-deep leadership rule shall apply: either 2 adults for one youth or 2 or more youth for 1 adult
- Travel arrangements for off-campus events will be coordinated through the Presbytery.
- All adult drivers of children and youth will be screened through a driving history search. A valid driver's license will be required.
- All vehicles should remain parked throughout the duration of the activity except for transporting children and obtaining supplies.
- Seat belts shall be provided for and worn by all passengers.



## **Privacy Notice**

*This privacy notice discloses the privacy practices for the Presbytery of Susquehanna Valley. This privacy notice applies solely to information collected by PSV and/or its website. It will notify you of the following:*

1. What personally identifiable information is collected from you through PSV and/or its website, how it is used and with whom it may be shared.
2. What choices are available to you regarding the use of your data.
3. The security procedures in place to protect the misuse of your information.
4. How you can correct any inaccuracies in the information.

## **Information Collection, Use, and Sharing**

We are the sole owners of the information collected by the Presbytery of Susquehanna Valley and/or its website. We only have access to/collect information that you voluntarily give us via email or other direct contact from you. We will not sell or rent this information to anyone.

We will use your information to respond to you, regarding the reason you contacted us. We will not share your information with any third party outside of our organization, other than as necessary to fulfill your request, e.g. process secure, encrypted background checks, process Camperships.

Unless you ask us not to, we may contact you via email in the future to tell you about upcoming ministry events, new volunteer opportunities, or changes to this privacy policy.

## **Your Access to and Control Over Information**

You may opt out of any future contacts from us at any time. You can do the following at any time by contacting (Name) at (Phone) or via e-mail at: E-Mail Address:

- See what data we have about you, if any.
- Change/correct any data we have about you.
- Have us delete any data we have about you.
- Express any concern you have about our use of your data.

### **Security**

We take precautions to protect your information. When you submit sensitive information to the Presbytery of Susquehanna Valley either in person or via our website, your information is protected both online and offline.

Wherever we collect sensitive information pertaining to your identity, that information is encrypted and transmitted to us in a secure way. You can verify this by looking for a closed lock icon at the bottom of your web browser, or looking for "https" at the beginning of the address of the web page.

While we use encryption to protect sensitive information transmitted online, we also protect your information offline. Only employees who need the information to perform a specific job (for example, Human Resources) are granted access to personally identifiable information. The computers/servers in which we store personally identifiable information are kept in a secure environment.

If you feel that we are not abiding by this privacy policy, you should contact us immediately at 607-323-4477 (PSV Phone Number) or by contacting the Stated Clerk or the Moderator of the Presbytery.

## Appendix A, Indications of Abuse

### **PRESBYTERY of SUSQUEHANNA VALLEY CHILD and YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY INDICATIONS OF SEXUAL ABUSE**

What is an “abused, neglected, or dependent child”?

The definition of an abused, neglected, or dependent child is very broad. It includes any child under eighteen whose parents or other person responsible for his care:

- Inflicts or allows to be inflicted, or creates a substantial risk of serious physical injury not by accident;
- Creates or allows to be created serious emotional damage;
- Uses or allows to be used cruel or grossly inappropriate procedures or devices to modify behavior;
- Neglects or refuses to provide care, supervision, or discipline necessary for his health;
- Abandons such child or allows such child to live in an environment injurious to the child’s welfare;
- Is unable to provide for care or supervision and lacks an appropriate child care alternative; or
- Commits or allows to be committed any act of sexual exploitation or any sexual act upon a child in violation of the law.

#### **Article 130 of the NYS Penal Code**

#### **How can children be at risk in a “safe” place like church?**

There may be several reasons children can be at risk even in “safe” places like a church. The following factors may contribute to the risk in a church setting:

- Ready access to children
- Institutional surprise: “We’re good people”
- Many churches have historically failed to prosecute
- Fewer external barriers than other youth-serving organizations
- Challenges coordinating child protection strategies

#### **Potential indicators of sexual abuse**

A **combination or pattern** of indicators may indicate the possibility of sexual abuse.

Potential indicators include:

- Child does not want to go to a certain place or be around a particular person
- Child shows sexual knowledge or behavior beyond that expected for his or her age
- Child is overly affectionate and seems seductive with peers and adults
- Child has recurring genital infections or pain in the genital area
- Child has difficulty in walking or sitting
- Child has torn, stained, or bloody underclothing
- Child shows reluctance to change clothes
- Child is withdrawn, chronically depressed, or displays infantile behavior
- Child has exceptionally poor peer relationships
- Child is threatened by physical contact
- Child has unexplained money or “gifts”

For more information, please visit:  
Prevent Child Abuse America at [www.preventchildabuse.org](http://www.preventchildabuse.org)  
Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina at [www.preventchildabusenc.org](http://www.preventchildabusenc.org)