

# ***Child and Youth Safety Policy***

## ***The Village Presbyterian Church (Northbrook, IL)***

### **Introduction**

#### **Purpose of the Policy**

The Village Presbyterian Church (TVPC) takes seriously its responsibility to provide a safe and nurturing environment for children and youth who participate in our ministries. This policy statement covers obligations of church employees and volunteers who work with children. All TVPC employees and volunteers are required to understand and comply with this policy, and complete the appropriate application form(s).

All church members and active attendees are encouraged to participate in the lives and ministry of our children. The church, however, has an overriding obligation to safeguard all children under its care from physical and/or psychological danger, abuse, and neglect. This policy, and the associated forms (e.g., “Child and Youth Volunteer Application”), reflects the commitment of The Village Presbyterian Church and its Session to provide a safe environment for all children, employees, and volunteers who participate in any church-sponsored activity or ministry.

#### **Definitions**

##### **Child/Youth**

For the purpose of this policy a “child” is anyone under the age of eighteen years of age. “Youth” are, by extension, older children. Although it is therefore redundant to use both terms, it clarifies our extension of this policy to all minors for those who may not initially understand this definition of children.

##### **Volunteers**

For the purpose of this policy, “volunteers” are defined as those people who of their own free will offer to help lead or assist in the children’s and youth ministries of The Village Presbyterian Church (Northbrook, IL). The term “volunteers” shall include but not be limited to all teachers, drivers, chaperones, childcare providers, hall monitors, youth sponsors, youth leaders, and confirmation mentors who work with children and youth.

This policy will distinguish between “regularly scheduled volunteers” and “occasional volunteers.” “Regularly scheduled volunteers” will refer to volunteers who contribute to TVPC’s children’s and youth ministries on a regular basis; program staff would assume their participation and contribution to a given ministry program whether their names were actually included on a program calendar or not. “Occasional volunteers” will refer to individuals who participate in the children’s or youth ministry on an ad hoc basis. Generally these volunteers would be specially contacted to request “one-time” assistance with a program or activity, although this occasional assistance might take place a few times in a given year. Examples of “occasional volunteers” might be a substitute Sunday School teacher, someone assisting at/with a special event, or a parent driving children to an activity.

For the purpose of this policy, childcare providers who are not regular paid employees of the church but are monetarily reimbursed for their occasional service shall be included in the term “volunteers.”

All volunteers who are in leadership roles in children's and youth ministries are living out the vows taken when children are baptized to nurture our children and youth in the Christian faith. Every volunteer plays a key role in fostering the spiritual development of children, youth, and families in our church community.

### **Danger, Abuse, Neglect**

Although this policy is primarily designed to address the issue of sexual abuse this issue should not be abstracted from the larger issue of child safety. Our desire is to also prevent—as far as reasonable and possible—the “normal” dangers of physical accident that occur to children in everyday activities.

Abuse is mistreatment (whether physical, verbal, emotional, or sexual) of a child that results in non-accidental harm or injury to a child that cannot be reasonably explained. Child sexual abuse includes, but is not limited to, any contact or interaction between a child and an adult when the child is being used for the sexual stimulation of the adult person or of a third person. The behavior may or may not involve touching. Sexual contact or interaction between an adult and a child is always considered forced and abusive whether or not the child consented to it.

Neglect is the failure to provide needed age-appropriate care, such as shelter, food, clothing, education, supervision, medical care, and other basic necessities needed for development of physical, intellectual, and emotional capacities.

### **Requirements**

In order to provide a safe community for children, youth, and adults, the church requires all employees and volunteers to comply with the “General Requirements of Employees and Volunteers in Child and Youth Ministries” and the “Child and Youth Safety Guidelines and Procedures” adopted by the Session of this church. As part of this process, all employees who are involved with children/youth, and all regularly scheduled volunteers in the areas of Children's or Youth Ministries, will be required to:

- complete the appropriate application(s);
- consent to a criminal background check;
- be interviewed by the staff person, or a designee, who oversees the ministry area in which they will volunteer.

All such employees and regularly scheduled volunteers will review the attached “Guidelines and Procedures” at an orientation session or meet with the appropriate staff person to review the policy and its implications. Occasional volunteers will be encouraged to attend a safety policy orientation session and will receive special supervision by professional staff to ensure that policy requirements are maintained. All employees and volunteers will be under the supervision of the respective professional staff persons.

Any person who is being investigated for, has been convicted of, or who is or has been legitimately suspected of criminal sexual conduct, neglect of a child, or physical abuse will not be permitted to work or volunteer in any church-sponsored activity or program involving children or youth.

### **Policy Review**

The Spiritual Growth Team shall annually review this policy and its implementation and, after consulting with the Administration Team and Personnel Team for revision suggestions, report to Session.

**PART 1:  
General Requirements of Employees and Volunteers  
in Children and Youth Ministries**

- A. At no time shall one employee or volunteer be allowed to be alone with a child or a youth. The only exceptions to this policy would be:
  - 1. Where the contact occurs in a public place and other persons are in and out of the area where the employee or volunteer is with the child or youth (e.g., Starbucks);
  - 2. Where the contact is in the church facility and in a location easily viewable by individuals working in the building, and when people are likely to be passing by (e.g., in a room with windows or an open door).
  - 3. The adult is the parent or legal guardian of the child.
- B. All employees and regularly scheduled children and youth volunteers must read the “Child and Youth Safety Policy” of this church; agree to it by completing and signing the appropriate application form(s), and attend a safety policy orientation and training session or meet with the appropriate staff person to review the “Guidelines and Procedures.”
- C. Volunteers will normally be drawn from the church membership; members for less than six months, and non-members, may volunteer to assist in the children’s and youth ministries but will be required to provide additional references as indicated on the “Child and Youth Volunteer Application.” All regularly scheduled volunteers, whether members or non-members, must be active participants in the life of the church for at least six months prior to volunteering their services to the children and youth ministries. The only exception to the “six-month” prerequisite will be for college or seminary students recruited by the professional staff and working under professional staff supervision, or with the consent of the Minister of Spiritual Growth.
- D. All programs or activities involving children or youth will be expected to be staffed according to the following adult/child ratio of supervision:

<i>Ages</i>	<i>Adults</i>	<i>Day Events</i>	<i>Overnight Events</i>
4–5	1	6 children	5 children
6–8	1	8 children	6 children
9–14	1	10 children	8 children
15–18	1	10 children	10 children

- E. Volunteers working with children or youth should be at least two years older than the oldest child participating in the activity.
- F. Volunteers staying overnight with children/youth must meet the expectations of a “regularly scheduled” volunteer (i.e., complete the “Child and Youth Volunteer Application,” be interviewed, and have a criminal background check).
- G. Employees and volunteers are expected to be actively vigilant for the physical and emotional safety of children and youth involved in TVPC programs and activities. This includes being alert to normal physical dangers present in a given context, physical and/or emotional harassment, evidence of abuse either on site or in the child’s larger life situation, and unacceptable one-on-one situations, either child-child or child-adult. It also requires an “awareness of presence”—knowing what children are involved in a program/activity and when they might be missing (e.g., have they gone to a restroom or have they wandered off to an unsupervised area of the facility). This calls for staff and volunteers, when not directly leading or participating in an activity, to be both visible and mobile; in other words they should

be actively moving around and engaged in the activities, ensuring that no children/youth are unattended, either within the church facility or outside.

- H. Employees and volunteers are required to report *any* potential child safety problems to their supervisor, including suspicious or inappropriate behavior such as suspected criminal sexual conduct, neglect of a child, or physical abuse.
- I. Volunteers who provide transportation for child/youth events are to fill out the “Volunteer Driver Information Form” and provide copies of their drivers’ licenses and insurance cards.

## **PART 2: Child and Youth Safety Guidelines and Procedures**

### **On-site Procedures**

- A. Professional staff will be expected to assess any situation in which one child or youth comes to their office to meet with them; if other people are in reasonably close and regular proximity (i.e., others are aware of the child’s presence in the office, and will generally be in the area) the office meeting may continue. At times when there is little or no traffic past their office the staff member will be expected to move the meeting, as soon as reasonably possible, to a more public and “viewable” location. The church library and room 224 (second-floor Multi-Purpose Room) should be seen as potential visible locations for one-on-one meetings, and staff should both have and understand their responsibility to preempt or exercise priority use of any room in an emergency situation where both confidentiality and visibility are required.
- B. Restroom use: Pre-school age children should be accompanied to the restroom by a teacher/volunteer who will wait outside the door/stall for the child (if a pre-school age child needs assistance in the restroom, the teacher should provide the assistance necessary, first encouraging the child to handle as much of the process as he/she can).
- C. The children’s restroom in the Tykes Kingdom (next to room 233: “Little Tykes: Toddlers”) is to be exclusively “child only” on Sunday mornings and when children’s programs/activities are taking place; a sign to this effect should be posted during these times.
- D. Children in fifth grade or below are only to be released from Children’s Ministry programs or activities to a parent/guardian, grandparent, or sibling in junior high or above (i.e., their parents or a responsible party are to pick them up from the room(s) where the program or activity takes place).
- E. Overnights: Males and females shall be segregated during sleeping times.
- F. Unexpected situations: If a situation unexpectedly arises that does not meet the criteria of this policy then alternatives must be put into place as soon as possible so the event is in compliance. The following examples are meant as illustrative only and are not to be perceived as the only possible solutions.
  - Example: If only one teacher and one child/youth shows up for a Sunday school class then the supervisor could recommend these solutions:
    - a. the teacher and child/youth could join another class for the morning;
    - b. the supervisor could join the teacher and child/youth;
    - c. the teacher and child/youth could attend church.
  - Example: Mentor/confirmand partners may meet the criteria of the policy in the following ways:
    - a. the confirmand could meet the mentor in a public place such as a coffee shop;
    - b. the confirmand/mentor pair could meet with another confirmand/mentor pair.

### **Off-site Procedures**

- A. At no time shall one employee or volunteer be allowed to be alone with a child or a youth. The only exception to this policy would be in a situation in which the contact occurs in a public place and other persons are in and out of the area where the employee or volunteer is working with the child or youth.
  - In transportation situations (e.g., a volunteer has one child in the car, possibly because he/she is the last of several to be dropped off) a parent of the child is to provide advance consent of the driver who will be transporting their child.
- B. When representing TVPC in any capacity all employees and child/youth volunteers must comply with the Child and Youth Safety Policy.
- C. As each facility will be different it will be the responsibility of the supervisors to determine how best to use the facility and comply with the church policy.
- D. Overnights: Males and females shall be segregated during sleeping times.
- E. All drivers and chaperones on children/youth overnight trips shall be included in all parts of the Child and Youth Safety Policy.

### **Non-TVPC Sponsored Use of the Church Facility Procedures**

- A. Anyone who uses The Village Presbyterian Church facility for non-church sponsored activities with children or youth (e.g., Boy Scouts, Alcoholics Anonymous) will be required to comply with the fundamental guideline of the policy: “At no time shall one employee or volunteer be allowed to be alone with a child or a youth. The only exception to this policy would be in a situation in which the contact occurs in a public place and other persons are in and out of the area where the employee or volunteer is working with the child or youth.”
- B. At the time a contract is made with a non-church group or person to use the church facility, it shall be the duty of the Church Administrator to obtain written confirmation from the users of their agreement to comply with the above.

## **PART 3: Administrative Issues**

### **Personnel Committee Procedures**

- A. It will be the responsibility of the church Personnel Committee to ensure that all potential new employees:
  - Are provided with a copy of the “Child and Youth Safety Policy;”
  - Have filled out the “Addendum to Employee Applications: Regarding Experience with Children and Youth;”
  - Have had a criminal background check.

This should be coordinated with search committees in those situations where a search committee is responsible to locate a candidate for employment. All background checks are to be kept in a secure location on the church premises and should be repeated at a recommended interval of every four years.
- B. An obligation to enforce the Child and Youth Safety Policy shall be written into the contract of each employee who has significant responsibility working with children or youth, or supervising employees or

volunteers who lead children or youth (e.g. the Minister of Spiritual Growth, the Children's Minister, the Youth Minister, the Nursery Coordinator, and the Children's Music Director) beginning January 1, 2008.

- C. All church employees are to be informed of their role as "Mandated Reporters" under Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) guidelines, and required to sign the DCFS "Acknowledgment of Mandated Reporter Status (Clergy)" or "Acknowledgment of Mandated Reporter Status" as applicable. The obligation to comply with responsibilities as "Mandated Reporters" is to be included in employee contracts.
- D. A current copy of the Illinois DCFS "Manual for Mandated Reporters" will be kept in the church office, and an electronic file maintained in the church "company" directory and distributed to all staff who are Mandated Reporters.
- E. Ministerial and program staff members, along with other employees who work with children or youth, will review the implementation of the "Child and Youth Safety Policy" once a year in conjunction with the Spiritual Growth Team's annual policy review.

### **Care of Documents**

- A. Only child and youth professional staff will review forms filled out by volunteers. The child and youth professional staff is defined as the Minister of Spiritual Growth, the Youth Minister, and the Children's Minister.
- B. Reports of background checks of potential employees will be directed to the Head of Staff; reporting from background checks of potential volunteers will be directed to the Minister of Spiritual Growth.
- C. All information will be treated in a confidential manner. Except in the case of a response to a report of suspicious activity, only the appropriate professional staff shall have access to the information on these documents. In the case of a report of suspicious activity, the Investigating Committee (as described in the church's Sexual Misconduct Policy) and the appropriate legal authorities will have access to the information.
- D. Volunteer application forms will be maintained by the Minister of Spiritual Growth and will be kept in a locked file cabinet.
- E. References will be contacted by the appropriate staff persons before the individual begins service.
- F. Volunteers will be required to complete a "Child and Youth Volunteer Application" form, and have a criminal background redone at a recommended interval of every four (4) years. In the interim years volunteers will be required to complete a "Child and Youth Volunteer Short Form" verifying that the information provided in their application is still accurate and truthful.

### **Training Procedures**

- A. All regularly scheduled volunteers are required to attend a safety policy orientation and training session or meet with the appropriate staff person to review the "Guidelines and Procedures."
- B. The curriculum for the orientation/training session will be prepared by the Minister of Spiritual Growth and will become an addendum to this policy statement.
- C. "Mandated Reporters" under the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) guidelines will be expected to complete the DCFS online training: "Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse: Training for Mandated Reporters," available at the DCFS website.

## **Part 4: Reporting of Suspicious or Inappropriate Activity**

### **Initial Reporting of Suspicious or Inappropriate Activity**

- A. Suspicious or inappropriate activity recognized by or brought to the attention of an employee or volunteer must be reported immediately (within 24 hours) to the appropriate professional staff person.
- B. The appropriate person(s) to whom to make this report to are:
  - 1. Spiritual Growth staff person (Minister of Spiritual Growth, Children's Minister, or Youth Minister)
  - 2. Senior Pastor/Head of Staff
  - 3. Associate Pastor
- C. The person making the report of the alleged abuse or receiving the report of suspicious activity shall then document the date, time and circumstances of the alleged incident.
- D. The person receiving the initial report of suspicious activity will report immediately to the Senior Pastor/Head of Staff and Minister of Spiritual Growth.
- E. The appropriate Spiritual Growth staff person (Children's Minister or Youth Minister), the Minister of Spiritual Growth, and the Pastor/Head of Staff, will determine what, if any, further action shall be taken.

### **Staff Response to Allegations of Abuse or Neglect**

Response to allegations of abuse or neglect will be handled according to procedures indicated in the TVPC "Sexual Misconduct Policy" in the Staff Manual.