

## ***Presbytery of Western Kentucky***

### ***Child, Youth, and Adults with Vulnerabilities Protection Policy***

#### **I. Introduction**

The Presbytery of Western Kentucky of the Presbyterian Church (USA) is committed to the safety, welfare, and protection of all children, youth, and adults with vulnerabilities participating in the programs and activities of the Presbytery. In an effort to minimize the possibility that any child, youth, or adults with vulnerabilities will be subjected to physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, the Presbytery has established policies and procedures as a faithful response to Christ's call to welcome children by providing an environment that is unquestionably safe and caring.

#### **II. Biblical and Theological Foundations**

Children are members of the Body of Christ and participants in God's beloved community. We recognize God's call to and love for the youngest among us when we baptize infants and children, yet church habits can sideline and patronize children, neglecting to treat them as worthy of the love and grace of God. These policies and procedures are being implemented as a faithful response to Christ's call to welcome children. In every area of the Church's life, we are called to include, nurture, and celebrate all children as they grow in their faith.

The call of the Church is to care for and protect the least and the vulnerable; children are among the most vulnerable members of society and yet often overlooked within the Church. Abuse - physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, or spiritual - can occur in any church. Incidents of violence or inappropriate behavior devastate individuals and destroy church communities. Improper, deceitful, defensive, or passive responses to suspicions and accusations compound the problem in the name of preserving the institution. The Presbytery implements this Child Protection Policy because harm to children cannot be permitted among the people of God.

#### **III. Purpose**

This policy directs that supervision of activities involving children, youth, and adults with vulnerabilities be conducted in a manner that minimizes the risk of abuse or of false allegations of abuse. All those under direct authority of the Presbytery, which includes installed teaching elders, commissioned ruling elders, and active and retired teaching elders in temporary positions involving any kind of pastoral services, as well as volunteers, will agree to abide by its provisions.

Events or activities sponsored by the Presbytery will always be governed by the guidelines of this policy, regardless of location. Events or activities sponsored by another entity will be governed by the policy in place at that entity. If there is no policy in place, the Presbytery will adhere to its own policy. In any case, adult leaders of the Presbytery will give priority to following the guidelines of this policy.

#### IV. Definitions

1. *Child, or Children*: persons from birth through fifth grade;
2. *Youth*: all persons from sixth grade through their eighteenth birthday. In group settings, this term shall also include those who have turned eighteen but are still in high school or are recently graduated seniors.
3. *Adults with vulnerabilities*: adults who, due to age, disability, illness, cognitive impairment, or life circumstances, may be unable to protect themselves from harm or give informed consent. This includes those who rely on others for care or support.
4. *Adult Leader*: includes those under direct authority of the Presbytery (installed pastors, commissioned ruling elders, active and retired teaching elders in temporary positions and any teaching elder providing any kind of pastoral services), who participate in presbytery or local church programs, activities or events which involve regular contact with children, youth, and/or adults with vulnerabilities or provide administrative or direct supervision to volunteers in such settings.
5. *Volunteer*: any active member of a local congregation of this presbytery who, for no monetary compensation, provides education and/or childcare services for or in connection with presbytery programs, activities or events, and has regular contact with children and/or youth.
6. *Abuse*: any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child's, youth, or adult with vulnerabilities' physical, psychological or emotional health and development.
7. *Physical Abuse*: any physical injury to a child, youth, or adult with vulnerabilities that are not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.
8. *Emotional abuse*: emotional injury when the child, youth, or adult with vulnerabilities is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.
9. *Sexual abuse*: a child, youth, or adult with vulnerabilities cannot give consent. Thus, any sexual activity between a child and an adult; between a child and another child who is at least four years older; or any sexual activity involving a youth or vulnerable adult where coercion, manipulation, intimidation, or incapacity is present shall be considered abuse. Such activities include fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, pornography, and other sexually exploitative behaviors.
10. *Neglect*: depriving a child, youth, or adult with vulnerabilities of their essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

#### V. Our Commitment

##### A. Training and Education

1. All teaching elders, ruling elders, commissioned ruling elders, presbytery staff, and committee leaders shall complete Child, Youth, and Adults with Vulnerabilities protection training every 36 months.
2. Congregations are strongly encouraged to participate in Child, Youth, and Adults with Vulnerabilities protection training and engage with educational materials provided by the presbytery and the PC(USA).

##### B. Leadership and Accountability

1. The PWKY Oversight Commission shall monitor and enforce the implementation of this policy, provide educational opportunities, and ensure compliance.
2. The Presbyter(s) or their designee shall review the Child Protection Policy and consent forms and applications when conducting reference checks, paying particular attention to the questions concerning criminal offenses, child neglect, physical/social abuse, and misconduct against children. Any volunteer not checked and cleared by the local church's Child Protection Policy shall be checked and cleared before participating in a presbytery sponsored activity. A disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by the Presbyter(s) or their designee on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. Generally, convictions for an offense involving children and/or for offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to our mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying event.

All completed forms shall be available to the Presbyter(s) and kept confidential and stored with other confidential Presbytery files and released only on a need-to-know basis so as to maintain the privacy of the individuals involved. The Presbyter(s) or their designee will contact any adult leaders or volunteers regarding any perceived problems that would potentially prohibit their working with children or youth.

3. *Designated Responsible Adult at Events*: It is the policy of the Presbytery of Western Kentucky that any event or activity including children or youth sponsored by the presbytery will involve at least one adult leader who will be responsible to the Presbytery for adherence to this policy for the duration of the activity or event.
4. *Teenage Volunteers*: The Presbytery recognizes that there may be times when it is necessary or desirable for child care providers (paid or volunteer) who are themselves under age 18 to assist in caring for young children during programs or activities. The following guidelines apply to teenage workers:
  - Must be at least age 14.
  - Must be screened as specified above.
  - Must be under the supervision of an adult and must never be left alone with children.
5. A minimum of two unrelated adults will be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during activities and programs. Some youth classes may have only one adult teacher in attendance during the class session; in these instances, doors to the classroom should remain open and there should be no fewer than three students with the adult teacher. The Presbytery does not allow minors to be alone with one adult during any Presbytery sponsored activity unless in a counseling situation.

#### C. Restroom Guidelines

1. Children five years of age and younger should use a classroom bathroom if one is available. If a classroom bathroom is not available, an adult should escort a

group of children to the hallway bathroom. They should always go in a group, never taking a child to the bathroom alone. The adult should check the bathroom first to make sure that it is empty, and then allow the children inside. The adult should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children back to the classroom. If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, the adult should open the bathroom door and call the child's name. If a child requires assistance, the adult should prop open the bathroom door, and leave the stall door open as they assist the child.

2. For children from six years of age through fifth grade, at least one adult should check the bathroom first to make sure that the bathroom is empty, and then allow the children inside. The adult should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children back to the classroom.
3. For the protection of all, adults 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 or legal guardians are strongly encouraged to have their children visit the bathroom prior to an activity or event.

#### D. Events and Overnight Trips

1. Parents and/or legal guardians are requested to sign a Permission Form for each of their children participating in Presbytery activities or events. (See attached.)
2. Whenever children or youth are involved in Presbytery-sponsored overnight trips, leaders must ensure that children are given appropriate privacy in the areas of sleeping, changing, and bathing. Specifically, an adult must never be permitted to sleep together in the same room or tent with a single child, unless the adult is the parent or legal guardian of the child. Children and adults must never be permitted to bathe or change clothes in the same facility at the same time.
3. Children of the opposite gender must not be permitted to sleep in the same room together, except in situations such as a lock-in or mission trip. In situations such as these, an entire group of children, supervised by at least two unrelated adults, may be sleeping in one big room together. However, parents or legal guardians will be informed in advance of these sleeping arrangements and will be asked to give explicit permission for these events. (See attached Permission form.) The maximum ratio of adults to youth for an event or activity involving overnight accommodations is one adult for every six youth.
4. Possession of contraband by children or youth (such as alcohol, illegal drugs; firearms and knives, explosives such as fireworks; and materials of an explicit nature) shall be strictly prohibited. On overnight trips the use of tobacco products by adults will be permitted only at a safe distance from children or youth so as not to transmit second hand smoke and only when not involved with programming activities.

#### E. Accidental Injuries to Children

In the event that a child or youth is injured while under the Presbytery's care, the following steps should be followed:

1. For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, workers will provide First Aid (Band-Aids, etc.) as appropriate and will notify the child's parent or legal guardian of the injury at the time the child is picked up from our care.
2. For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple first aid, the parent and/or legal guardian will immediately be summoned in addition to the site supervisor. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.
3. Once the child has received appropriate medical attention, an incident report will be completed in the case of injuries requiring treatment by a medical professional.
4. All offsite activities shall be accompanied by a First Aid Kit provided either by a local church or the presbytery office.

#### F. Medications

1. It is the policy of the Presbytery of Western Kentucky not to administer prescription or non-prescription medications to the children or youth under our care. Medications should be administered by the parent or legal guardian at home. Exceptions to this policy would include children with potentially life-threatening conditions such as asthma or epilepsy or severe allergic reactions. Parents of children or youth with these conditions should develop a plan of action prior to their attendance.

#### G. Transportation

1. It is recommended that children or youth be transported in groups rather than alone. Parental or legal guardian permission shall be secured before driving a single child or youth in any Presbytery sponsored activity. When transporting children or youth to an activity, all drivers must be over the age of twenty-five (25) and possess a valid operator's license and current automobile insurance. The number of persons per vehicle and utilization of seat belts and other restraints shall follow state and local vehicle laws. A signed parental form shall accompany all children and youth attending activities or events away from presbytery or local church property.

#### H. Discipline and Behavioral Guidelines

1. It is the policy of the Presbytery of Western Kentucky not to administer corporal punishment, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. There should be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other physical discipline of children. Workers should consult with the Presbyter(s) or their designee if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

#### I. Physical Contact

1. Touch is an essential component in nurturing lives. However, physical contact with children and youth must be developmentally appropriate. Be aware of and sensitive to differences in sexual development, cultural differences, family backgrounds, individual personalities, and special needs.

#### J. Electronic Communication and Appropriate Boundaries

1. At no time shall an adult working with children or youth pursue a dating, flirtatious, or romantic relationship with a child or youth. Where possible, copies of any written or electronic communications (including social media such as

Facebook, texting and emails) between an adult working with children or youth and a child or youth shall be made available to the parent(s) or legal guardian(s) of the child or youth and another adult who can serve as a witness to such communication. Any communication between an adult and a child or youth shall be limited to church related matters.

K. Inclusion of Children and Youth with Special Needs

1. Parents and legal guardians are encouraged to notify the adult leader if their child or youth has any special needs that would require special attention. The adult leader will work with the family and/or special consultants to provide reasonable and appropriate services that will allow for a positive experience for all those involved. Inclusion of children and youth with special needs or disabilities will be considered in the planning stages of all programs.

## **VI. Reporting**

Anyone who believes they have experienced or witnessed abuse or neglect is encouraged to report the matter promptly. Reports may be made to:

- The Presbyter(s)
- The Stated Clerk
- The Moderator of the Committee on Ministry
- The Moderator of the Permanent Judicial Commission
- Any trusted presbytery officer or committee member

Reports will be taken seriously and handled with confidentiality, pastoral sensitivity, and procedural fairness.

Upon receiving a report, the Presbytery will:

1. Conduct a timely, thorough investigation.
2. Involve the appropriate committees and officers in accordance with the Book of Order and presbytery policies.
3. Take corrective or disciplinary action where necessary, up to and including termination or initiation of a disciplinary process under Church Discipline in the Book of Order.

The Presbytery will not tolerate retaliation against anyone making a good-faith report of abuse, neglect, or participating in an investigation. All reports of child abuse or neglect shall be held in absolute confidence. No person shall communicate any information concerning the alleged event to any person except as necessary to cooperate with any official investigation. Any breach of this confidentiality by an employee of the Presbytery shall be cause for immediate dismissal. The Presbyter(s), in consultation with the official conducting the investigation may authorize limited additional disclosure if necessary to protect other children from harm in the near future, particularly where the person responsible for the abuse cannot be identified, but in no case shall the identity of the victim or the accused person be disclosed except as required by law.

## **VII. Commitment to Reconciliation**

When acts of abuse or neglect occur, the Church is called not only to justice but also to healing and reconciliation. Following the guidance of Matthew 18:15–20, restorative responses may be pursued alongside disciplinary procedures, seeking healing for individuals and the community.

**VIII. Review and Distribution**

This policy shall be reviewed every three years and updated as necessary. It will be distributed to all employees, teaching elders, committee members, and made available on the Presbytery website and Manual of Operations. Copies of this Child Protection Policy will be made available to any adult participating in a presbytery sponsored activity or event with children or youth.

**IX. Acknowledgement**

All individuals to whom this policy applies shall sign a written acknowledgement indicating their agreement, which shall remain in effect during their time of membership, employment, or volunteer service in the Presbytery.

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (print name), have read this policy and agree to abide by its provisions as it applies to my particular ministry situation.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Presbytery of Western Kentucky**

**Permission Form**

**Appendix A**

As parent/legal guardian of \_\_\_\_\_, I grant

(Print Student's Name)

permission for him/her/them to participate in the trip described below.

Destination: \_\_\_\_\_

Nature or purpose of the trip: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Date/time leaving: \_\_\_\_\_ Date/time returning: \_\_\_\_\_

Sponsors/Chaperones: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Cost of Trip Per Child: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Parent/Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

I am aware that when I am on a church-sponsored trip, I am under the jurisdiction and supervision of the presbytery-employed sponsors/chaperones and that my behavior must conform to the group covenant and reasonable instructions from chaperones. I understand I will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action for violations of these rules and regulations.

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Student

\_\_\_\_\_

Date