

Northeast Presbyterian Church

Child/Student Protection Policy

08/2015

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I. Purpose and Mission

The mission of Northeast Presbyterian Church (“NEPC”) is to help as many people as possible understand that Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever. As a result, NEPC seeks to provide a safe and secure environment to learn and grow. As we teach the children and students in our care, our goals are to:

1. Protect the children and students of NEPC from harm and abuse,
2. Educate all participants concerning abuse issues and safe child/student protection practices,
3. Provide appropriate response guidelines.

Through adherence to this policy, NEPC intends to insure that there are guidelines and boundaries in place to create an appropriate and safe environment for children, students, staff and volunteers involved in the ministry of our congregation.

Definitions

Child: A boy or girl from birth through fifth grade.

Student: A boy or girl from sixth grade through 18 years of age. This also includes boys or girls who are older than 18 years but whose parents or guardians have identified them as having “special needs” and who participate in church authorized ministry events.

Reporting Standard: In accordance with S.C. Code Ann. § 63-7-310, reports should be made when any person has a reason to believe that a child/student has been, or may be, abused and/or neglected. Conclusive proof or evidence is not required. Persons who make a report in good faith are immune from civil and criminal liability, pursuant to S.C. Code Ann. § 63-7-390.

Mandated Reporter: A childcare worker or member of the clergy, as set forth in S.C. Code Ann. § 63-7-310, must report to the local Department of Social Services or law enforcement agency when they have a reason to believe that a child’s physical or mental health or welfare has been or may be adversely affected by abuse or neglect. Additionally, as set forth in S.C. Code Ann. § 63-7-30(c), any person who has reason to believe that a child/student’s physical or mental health or welfare has been or may be adversely affected by abuse and neglect may report to the local Department of Social Services or law enforcement agency.

Child/student abuse, neglect, or harm, as set forth in S.C. Code Ann. § 63-7-20 occurs in the following cases:

1. someone inflicts or allows to be inflicted upon the child physical or mental injury or engages in acts or omissions which present a substantial risk of physical or mental injury to the child.
2. someone commits or allows to be committed against the child a sexual offense as defined by the laws of this State or engages in acts or omissions that present a substantial risk that a sexual offense as defined in the laws of this State would be committed against the child;
3. someone encourages, condones, or approves the commission of delinquent acts by the child and the commission of the acts is shown to be the result of the encouragement, condonation, or approval.

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Physical injury, as set forth in S.C. Code Ann. § 63-7-20, means death or permanent or temporary disfigurement or impairment of any bodily organ or function.

Mental injury, as set forth in S.C. Code Ann. § 63-7-20, means an injury to the intellectual, emotional, or psychological capacity or functioning of a child as evidenced by a discernible and substantial impairment of the child's ability to function when the existence of that impairment is supported by the opinion of a mental health professional or medical professional.

Supervising Church Authority: In the case of suspicion of abuse, a volunteer or employee must report this information as soon as possible to any pastor, elder, or ministry director. The recipient of the information will then act in accordance with S.C. Code Ann. § 63-7-310. A volunteer/employee should not fail to report suspected abuse because of uncertainty about who to report to.

II. Application and Screening Process for Volunteers and Employees

A. Volunteer Applications

Those who wish to volunteer for a position requiring contact with children or students at Northeast Presbyterian Church must:

1. Fill out the Volunteer Application and sign the ministry covenant.
2. Have the appropriate checks completed and kept in a confidential file on the church property. Such checks may include, but are not limited to: references, SLED criminal history, DSS Central Registry and the SLED Sex Offender Registry.
3. Be required to read the Child/Student Protection Policies of NEPC, and sign stating he or she understands the requirements of the policy.
4. Have been a member of Northeast Presbyterian for 6 months or more before assuming a volunteer status with access to minors, or as approved by the Executive Staff.

EXCEPTIONS:

1. Special Activity Volunteers:
These volunteers work with children/students for a designated event or time period. Under no circumstances should such a volunteer ever be alone with any child or student, unless the parent/guardian of the child/student has given prior written permission. Church membership is preferred, but not required when it is deemed appropriate by the Executive Staff as requested by a ministry director. These volunteers could include, but are not limited to, Vacation Bible School volunteers, chaperones on trips, and students who lead groups involving children. These volunteers must:
 - a. Meet with the Ministry Director prior to service,
 - b. Review the Child/Student Protection Policies of NEPC,
 - c. Fill out the Volunteer Application and sign the ministry covenant,
 - d. Have the appropriate checks made and references given, as deemed appropriate by the Ministry Director.
2. Parents of children serving on Sunday mornings in their child's class, as long as there are two approved adults or volunteers in the room.

In the initial congregational implementation of the NEPC Child/Student Protection Policy, members who have been volunteering in the life of NEPC for one year or more are exempt from the reference checks, but not the background checks.

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Church Officers and staff involved with any Child/Student ministry shall be required to complete all appropriate paperwork and receive approval.

The Volunteer Application and Policy Brochure shall be included in each new member's packet, and the church's policy shall be explained as a part of the Visitors/Inquirers Course.

B. NEPC Staff Applications

All NEPC staff is required to complete the Employment Application and submit to all reference checks and background checks.

In the initial implementation of the NEPC Child/Student Protection Policy, current NEPC staff is exempt from the reference checks, but not the background checks.

C. Screening Process

The staff person who recruits/supervises a volunteer who has access to minors is responsible for receiving a fully completed application and receiving approval before that volunteer begins his/her volunteer duties. **NO VOLUNTEER SHALL BE ALLOWED TO ACT IN ANY CAPACITY PRIOR TO THE COMPLETION OF ALL BACKGROUND CHECKS AND A FULL REVIEW OF THE APPLICATION.** The cost of background checks or other screening tools will be covered under the Business Administration budget, or the budget of a specific ministry area, as determined by the Executive Staff.

Completed Applications are given to the Director of Administration (or designated person) for processing and approval.

The Director of Administration or designated person to implement and maintain this policy is responsible for:

1. Running all background checks.
2. Filing the application and related papers in a locked and confidential location.
3. Making an annual report to the Session including, but not limited to:
 - a. The number of background checks completed
 - b. The number of reference checks completed
 - c. The number of applications on file
 - d. The names of those who have approved applications on file

The results of any individual's reference checks and background checks are to be kept strictly confidential. These forms and the person's application are to be kept in a locked file cabinet on the church property under the supervision of the Director of Administration (or designated person). Pastors, the Clerk of the Session, and ministry directors may request access to the files in writing. If access is granted, access to the files will be given within 24 hours (Monday – Friday). All files must remain on the NEPC campus and under the supervision of the Director of Administration (or designated person).

If information of a cautionary nature is revealed through a reference or background check, the person conducting the check shall note this information in writing. This information shall be considered by the Senior Pastor and the Executive Staff (or designated person). This group shall decide on a course of action. This decision must be documented in writing, dated and placed in the person's file. In such a case, the person's volunteer application may be:

1. Accepted unconditionally;
2. Accepted with clearly defined restriction; or
3. Denied.

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The following results shall automatically preclude an individual from service:

1. any felony conviction in the preceding 10 years,
2. any felony conviction involving the use of drugs,
3. any violent misdemeanor in the preceding 10 years,
4. any misdemeanor involving the use of drugs or alcohol in the preceding 5 years,
5. any convictions or no contest pleas for any offense involving children/youth which might relate to child abuse or sex abuse including contributing to the delinquency of a minor, child endangerment, providing alcohol or other substances to a minor and similar charges.

The Pastor and/or a member of the Executive Staff shall inform the ministry director, who shall inform the volunteer/employee of the decision and its implications.

Northeast Presbyterian Church reserves the right to review applications from volunteers and/or employees at any time. Background checks or new reference checks may be requested either randomly or because of some concern.

III. Standards of Behavior

These guidelines apply to all individuals who work with children and students at Northeast Presbyterian Church (NEPC). For purposes of this section, children are separated further into two groups, preschool and elementary.

A. General Guidelines

1. Two paid or volunteer staff shall be present during all preschool/elementary/student activities whenever possible. If two adults are not present for any activity on the church premises, classroom or bathroom doors should be left open (doors with windows may be closed but not locked. Rooms with split doors may leave the top half open). Hall monitors will be available if assistance is necessary.
2. Definitions:
 - Preschool is defined as 0-k4
 - Elementary is defined as k5-5th grade
 - Student is defined as 6th-12th grade
3. Preschool/elementary guidelines will be followed for the ratio of adults to preschoolers for all NEPC activities. When the number of preschoolers/elementary students participating in an NEPC activity exceeds ten, an additional adult is suggested for every 10 children/students. In situations involving a large group, the ratio of adults to children/students should be no greater than 1/10 whenever reasonably possible.
4. Middle School and High School ministry events may be supervised by one approved adult.
5. For activities away from NEPC, the following rules shall apply:
 - Travel Events are to be supervised by no fewer than 2 adults regardless of the number of preschool/elementary/students involved.
 - There shall always be same-sex supervision for all rooms/cabins/etc.
 - All participants will have parental consent and a medical release form in writing.
 - Exceptions to these guidelines must be approved by the Executive Staff and parents of affected minors must be notified
6. These procedures shall be followed before and after events, until all preschoolers/children/students are in the custody of their parents or guardians.

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7. In the case of unforeseen circumstances, or emergency, when one adult is left with a group of preschool/elementary/students, the remaining adult is to alert a supervising adult.
8. Employees or volunteers who observe questionable or inappropriate behavior affecting preschoolers, elementary or students must report it as soon as possible to the appropriate age-level director. If the appropriate director is not available, the incident should be reported to a Pastor, or another director. The Senior Pastor shall be notified immediately, and the incident will be investigated as set forth in this policy.
9. Employees and volunteers will not touch, interact with, or communicate with children or students in any way that is intended to be sexually stimulating. Common expressions of affection, affirmation, and encouragement are appropriate, as long as they are not excessive or imposed on the child/student. No expression of any kind is appropriate when a child or student indicates discomfort with it or when it is imposed unnecessarily or in excessive frequency. No one should act in a sexually stimulating way in front of a child/student.

B. Registration Procedures

1. For all church activities at NEPC, members and visitors shall register their preschoolers before participation in the activity.
 - Preschoolers will be registered at the Preschool Welcome Center or classroom doors.
2. All Elementary children will be registered by the parent/guardian/responsible party at the beginning of Sunday School or other approved church activity.
3. Students (6th - 12th grade) will register themselves in their classrooms.

C. Transportation Procedures

1. Adults should be used as drivers for events that require transportation, whenever possible. If a student (a person of driving age but under 18 years of age) should drive, the staff shall have written permission from the driver's and each passenger's parent or guardian. Each proposed driver will provide the Church with evidence of liability insurance before being allowed to transport children or students for Church functions. There should never be one adult driving one child/student, unless prior written permission from the child/student's parent/guardian.
2. All drivers must be approved under separate criteria to be eligible to drive a church bus or vehicle. All Drivers for Children/Students must complete volunteer application and background check.
3. In the event that transportation is required for an NEPC sponsored event, the driver of each vehicle is responsible for seeing that all traffic laws are obeyed.

D. Student Volunteer Standards

Members of the church family who are under the age of 18 may also volunteer in ministry. These students are referred to as "student volunteers." Their roles and responsibilities are governed by the following standards:

1. All student volunteers will complete the application process required of all adult volunteers and staff, except background checks are not required.
2. Student volunteers who have direct contact with minors, who are outside the care of their parents, must work under the supervision of at least one approved adult.

3. Student volunteers must be at least two years older than the minors with whom they are interacting.
4. Student volunteers in the church nursery must be at least 12 years old.

E. Preschool (0-4K) Security Standards

1. Parents of Preschool children will complete a Registration Card, which will be kept on file in the appropriate room.
2. Preschool Children must have a Child Security Tag. Part 1 goes on the child's back and Part 2 goes on the child's bag. Part 3 remains with the parent or approved guardian.
3. Pagers will be issued to parents or approved guardians, who are solely responsible for responding to pages in a timely manner. Failure to comply may result in a loss of nursery privilege in the future.
4. Parents or other adults, not working in the Church nurseries/classrooms, are not to enter the rooms when dropping off their children.
5. At the conclusion of the worship hours, children in the nursery classrooms may only be released into the care of a parent/guardian, with the Child Security Tag.

F. Elementary (K5 — 5th grade) Security Standards

1. Parents of Elementary children are asked to complete a Registration Card, which will be kept on file in the appropriate room.
2. K5 through Fifth Grade children will be picked up from their room at the conclusion of Sunday School, Hometown Grace, or other approved church activity. They will be released only to their parent/guardian/responsible party or other person designated on the Registration Card/sign in sheet.

G. Student (6th — 12th grade) Security Standards

1. Students will be asked to complete a Registration Card, which will be kept on file with the ministry director.
2. Attendance records will be kept weekly.
3. Parents will be contacted if discipline issues arise.

IV. Reporting Procedures

When a member, volunteer or employee of the Church receives allegations of abuse or neglect, the procedures outlined should be followed. Occasionally, unique circumstances of an allegation may require a change in the order of procedures. Allegations will be reported to the appropriate authorities according to the reporting standard defined previously in this policy.

- A. When an employee or volunteer has reason to believe that a child is the victim of abuse or neglect, the employee or volunteer must immediately report this information to the ministry director, any Pastor or Executive Staff as outlined above. Church employees or volunteers who receive information from children alleging abuse or neglect, either by someone within the church or outside of the church, should listen and offer support to the child at the time of the disclosure. Under no circumstances should an employee or volunteer of the church attempt to personally investigate or resolve any allegations through any method, including interview of the child or other potential witnesses.
- B. In all cases the Senior Pastor MUST also be notified immediately.

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- C. Once the ministry director, any Pastor or Executive Staff has been informed, if the information sets forth possible harm or abuse, as set forth herein, he or she will immediately provide all necessary information to the appropriate authorities, as provided in S.C. Code Ann. § 20-7-510. The Senior Pastor, or his designee, shall at all times serve as the spokesperson for the Church unless otherwise determined by the Session.
- D. The Senior Pastor, or his designee, shall also contact the child's parent or guardian and inform them of the allegation and the steps taken. If the report alleges abuse or neglect by the parent or guardian, the Senior Pastor may elect to have the appropriate authorities contact the parent or guardian.
- E. Within 24 hours of a report of abuse to authorities, the Senior Pastor shall instruct the church office to inform the members of the Session, by mail or e-mail, of the allegation and report without reference to the names of those involved.
- F. If the allegation of abuse is against one of the ordained Pastors of our congregation, the Clerk of Session shall immediately contact the Palmetto Presbytery and the appropriate legal authorities. The Clerk shall ask the Moderator of the Palmetto Presbytery to assign a pastor from the Presbytery to moderate a called Session meeting to apprise the Session of the steps and provisions in the Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA) and any other official policy of the Palmetto Presbytery, which governs such a situation.

V. Church Response & Ministry

A. Victim Protection

1. Upon receiving information of abuse or neglect involving an employee or volunteer of the church, the person who reports the allegations to his/her Supervising Church Authority should immediately take steps to ensure that the child is not placed in the presence or proximity of the named church employee or volunteer. For the duration of the investigation, the ministry director or Pastor (or his designee), shall continue to ensure that the subject child is not placed in a situation where the employee or volunteer is present.
2. Any volunteer or employee of the church who becomes aware of an allegation of abuse or neglect will maintain confidentiality and will not share any information regarding the allegation except to the Senior Pastor, Executive Staff, ministry director and the appropriate investigating authorities. The Senior Pastor, or designee, is the only person who may speak for the church in the case of public requests for information, statements, interviews, etc.

B. Session Response

Once the authorities have determined there are sufficient grounds for an investigation of the alleged abuse, the Pastors and Session shall have a called Session meeting for the purpose of outlining a congregational response plan. This plan shall include, but not be limited to:

1. The language and information to be included in a public response.
2. An explanation of what the congregation can expect during an investigation by local authorities.
3. A call to compassion and a call to refrain from extraneous discussion and gossip as unbecoming the body of Christ.
4. A reminder to the congregation that the Senior Pastor or his designee is, by Session policy, the only person who may officially speak for the congregation.
5. A plan for continued pastoral support by pastors and congregation for both the alleged victim and alleged perpetrator (assuming both are members of the congregation).
6. Designate who should contact the church's insurance carrier.

C. Pastoral Response

In the case of any allegation or suspicion of abuse or neglect that involves a member or visitor of our congregation, it is the desire of the Session and Pastors that all involved parties will be given equal and appropriate pastoral care and support. As painful as such an allegation or suspicion may be, we recognize that the realities of the situation may not be easily discerned. Therefore, we intend to treat both the alleged perpetrator and the alleged victim as children of God needing support and prayer, and to leave the discernment of the facts to the appropriate authorities who are better trained to investigate such a painful situation. Our goal is to express the love and concern of God for all involved in any allegation of abuse or neglect. In order to achieve that goal, the following guidelines have been adopted by Northeast Presbyterian Church:

1. When an allegation has been received, the pastoral staff shall meet and decide how best to proceed in providing pastoral care of the alleged victim, alleged perpetrator and the congregation at large.
2. The pastoral staff shall attempt to assign each individual/family to a member of the pastoral staff. This staff person shall be the person's primary pastoral care giver during the time of investigation and beyond. It is recommended that different pastoral staff persons be assigned to both the alleged victim and the alleged perpetrator.
3. Appropriate Elders shall be invited to coordinate pastoral care for each individual and family.
4. If both parties are members of our congregation, the pastors assigned to each of the parties shall counsel the individual/families on the importance of maintaining distance and separation during the course of the investigation. Pastors shall try to ensure that worship, education and fellowship opportunities for both parties are made available.

D. Other Actions

If the allegation of abuse is against an employee of the church, that employee shall be suspended from any involvement with children/students during the investigation, and the Senior Pastor, Executive Staff and the Chairperson of the Session's Administration Committee shall review the facts known to them and determine in their discretion whether it is in the best interest of the church for the employee to be:

- Suspended during the course of the investigation;
- Terminated; or
- Retained with job functions that do not involve contact with children/students.

If the investigation by the authorities results in charges being filed or a finding of abuse or neglect against an employee, the employee shall be terminated.

If the investigation is concluded with no charges or findings filed against the employee, the Senior Pastor, Executive Staff and the Chairperson of the Session's Administration Committee should review the information revealed during the course of the investigation. Based on this information, this group will determine whether it is in the best interests of the church for the employee to be terminated or retained.

If the allegation of abuse is against a volunteer, that volunteer shall be relieved of responsibilities involving children/students served by the church for the duration of the investigation. The status of the volunteer may be revisited upon conclusion of the investigation at the discretion of the Senior Pastor, Executive Staff and the Chairperson of the Session's Administration Committee. If the investigation is concluded with no charges or findings filed against the volunteer, the Senior Pastor, Executive Staff and the

Chairperson of the Session's Administration Committee should review the information revealed during the course of the investigation. Based on this information, the Senior Pastor, Executive Staff and the Chairperson of the Session's Administration Committee may reinstate the volunteer if they believe it to be in the best interest of the church. However, if the investigation results in either charges being filed against the volunteer or finding of abuse or neglect filed against the volunteer, the volunteer may not be reinstated. The outcome of the investigation shall be noted in writing in the member's confidential file.

VI. Maintenance of the Policy

The Director of Administration, or another suitable staff person as appointed by the Session, shall oversee the implementation and maintenance of the policy as outlined herein.

<u>Ministry Covenant</u>	
<i>I, the undersigned, testify that I have read and understand the NEPC Child/Student Protection Policy and pledge to uphold all guidelines and standards as outlined in this policy.</i>	
_____	_____
Name (printed)	Date

Signature	

Witness (printed)	

Signature of Witness	