

Northeast Presbyterian Church

Child/Student Protection Policy

05/2019

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I. Vision and Values

Northeast Presbyterian Church (“NEPC”) connects people to God and each other through Christ by gathering, growing and going. To facilitate this, NEPC seeks to provide a safe and secure environment in which learn and grow. As we shepherd 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 establish guidelines and boundaries 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 the completion of 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 shall 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.

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.

II. Application and Screening Process for Volunteers and Employees

A. Volunteer

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

1. Meet with a Supervising Church Authority.
2. Permit checks to be completed and kept in a confidential file on the church property. Such checks may include, but are not limited to: references, DSS Central Registry and the Sex Offender Registry.
3. 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 children or students, or approved by a Supervising Church Authority.
5. Complete any further items as deemed necessary by the Ministry Director over the area of service.

These items listed #1-#5 are required for all volunteers, 18 years of age or older, whether for a one-time event or on an ongoing basis. Under no circumstances should a volunteer ever be alone with any child or student.

B. Staff

All NEPC staff are required to submit to all reference checks and background checks prior to employment.

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

C. Screening Process

The staff member who recruits/supervises a volunteer having access to children/students is responsible for making sure all above stated requirements are complete before that volunteer begins 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 REQUIREMENTS.**

Completed requirements 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 obtaining and reviewing:

1. All background checks.
2. Filing 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 CPPs signed and turned in.

The results of any individual's reference checks and background checks are to be kept strictly confidential. These forms 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. The Director of Administration shall maintain a log of all persons reviewing the files after approval and the reason for the review. 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 revealed to the Senior Pastor and the Director of Administration. This group shall decide on a course of action.

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
6. any conviction or no contest pleas for any offense involving providing alcohol or other substances to a minor and similar charges within the preceding 10 years.

The Pastor or the Director of Administration shall inform the supervising pastor and the ministry director, who shall inform the volunteer/employee of the decision and its implications.

Northeast Presbyterian Church may require additional applications from volunteers and/or employees at any time. Background checks or new reference checks may be requested either randomly or in the event of some concern. Background checks will be required of volunteers/employees at least every 3 years.

It is the responsibility of the volunteer to report to his/her Supervising Church Authority of any event that may preclude them from continuing in service. This includes but is not limited to, current arrests.

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 approved volunteer staff shall be present during all preschool/elementary 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 without windows must 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 (as stated in the Code of Conduct) 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 recommended 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 must be supervised by at least 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 supervising church authority and parents of affected children/students must be notified
6. Above procedures shall be followed before and after events, until all preschoolers/children/students have been returned to their parents or guardians.
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 the next level report.
8. Employees or volunteers who observe questionable or inappropriate behavior affecting a child or student 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.

C. Transportation Procedures

1. Adults should be used as drivers for events that require transportation, whenever possible. 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 has been received.
2. Adult drivers must be approved under separate criteria to be eligible to drive a church bus or vehicle. All drivers for children/students must complete the application and screening process.
3. In the event that transportation is required for an NEPC children/student event, the driver of each vehicle shall ensure that all traffic laws are obeyed.

D. Student Volunteer Standards

Members of the church family 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 children/students, 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 children/students 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 will sign in at the Kid's Ministry Welcome desk and print off appropriate tag of identification.
3. Preschool Children must have a Child Security Tag. Part 1 (name tag) goes on the child's back and Part 2 (guardian tag) remains with the parent or guardian.
4. Parents or other adults, not working in the Church nurseries/classrooms, are not to enter the rooms when dropping off their child(ren).
5. At the conclusion of the church event, children in the nursery classrooms may only be released into the care of a parent/guardian possessing the guardian tag.

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

1. Parents of Elementary children shall complete a Registration Card, which will be kept on file in the appropriate room.
2. Elementary children will sign in at the Kid's Ministry Welcome desk and print off appropriate tag of identification to be retained by their parent or guardian.
3. Elementary children will be picked up from their room at the conclusion of the event/function or other church activity. They will be released into the care of a parent/guardian possessing the guardian tag.

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

1. Students shall complete a Registration Card, which will be kept on file with the ministry director or Assistant Pastor.
2. Attendance records will be kept weekly.

IV. Reporting Procedures

When a member, volunteer or employee of the Church has suspicion of abuse or neglect, the procedures outlined below should be followed. Allegations will be reported to the appropriate church authorities according to the reporting standard defined previously in this policy.

A. ***What Am I Required to Report?*** The minimum standard for a report to be made to DSS is any ‘reasonable suspicion’ of abuse. Reasonable suspicion does not mean you have proof that abuse has occurred.

There are 3 ways you will learn about abuse:

1. A child/student discloses abuse
2. You observe abuse
3. You have reasonable suspicion of abuse

When a child/student discloses abuse or you observe abuse, you must report the abuse by following the following reporting protocol below.

NEPC has a Code of Conduct that describes the boundaries adults must maintain when interacting with children. Every adult who works with children must sign Code of Conduct, acknowledging their agreement to abide by the Code of Conduct when interacting with children. By signing the Code of Conduct, volunteers give permission to any supervising staff who observes any inappropriate or questionable behavior to speak to him/her about what has been observed and to remind them of the commitment we have made to maintain safe boundaries between adults and children.

When a person is seen violating our Code of Conduct, the adult who observed the inappropriate behavior or boundary violation shall intervene on behalf of the child and speak to the supervising church authority.

If there is reason to believe the child is at risk and this risk has been reported to the supervising church authority, a formal incident report described below must be completed.

It may also be determined that there is reasonable suspicion that a child has been abused elsewhere. In such a case mandated reporters must act as such, even though the abuse is not related to a program or ministry of the church.

Making a report to DSS does not constitute an accusation of abuse. Making a report means we are requesting that a professional service be performed to determine if a child is at risk and if abuse has occurred.

- B. ***To Whom in the Church is a Report Made?*** If the child/student is in immediate danger, call law enforcement or 911 immediately.

For Adult Volunteers – If you have received a disclosure of abuse, you have observed abuse, or you have reasonable suspicion of abuse, you must report it immediately to your supervising church authority. The person making the report will be referred to here as the ‘Reporter’.

For Paid Staff/Ministry Directors – If you have received a disclosure of abuse, you have observed abuse, or you have reasonable suspicion of abuse, you as the ‘Reporter’ must report it immediately to a Pastor. This must also be reported immediately to the Senior Pastor.

The Senior Pastor, or his designee, may also contact the child/student’s parent or guardian and inform them of the suspicion or allegation and the steps taken. If the suspicion or allegation alleges abuse or neglect by the parent or guardian, the Senior Pastor may elect to have the appropriate authorities contact the parent or guardian.

- C. If the allegation of abuse is against an ordained Pastor in our congregation, the Clerk of Session shall immediately contact the Palmetto Presbytery and the appropriate legal authorities. The Clerk shall ask the Stated Clerk 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.
- D. ***Incident Report*** – After the verbal report has been made, the Reporter must complete a incident report and submit the completed, signed and dated form to the person to whom it was verbally reported. The Incident Report must be submitted as soon as possible, but no later than 6 hours after the verbal report was made. If the verbal report was given to the individual in charge of the event, the Reporter then is responsible, as soon as practically possible, to contact the supervising church authority as well as to initiate the Incident Report completion.

The Reporter and the person receiving the Incident Report must each sign the Incident Report, noting the dates and times the Incident Report was signed. Both the Reporter and the person receiving the report must retain a copy of the Incident Report with both signatures showing dates and times.

If there is reasonable cause to view camera footage for a more accurate report of the incident the Supervising Church authority will initiate that procedure. Footage will be held for 90 days.

Any ministry director who received an Incident Report must forward the original Incident Report to a Pastor. A Pastor must sign the Incident Report, indicating the time and date received.

All Incident Reports received by a Pastor or his designee must be reported to DSS.

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 reporting the suspicions or allegations to his/her Supervising Church Authority should immediately ensure that the child is removed from the presence or proximity of the alleged perpetrator of the abuse or neglect. 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 shall maintain confidentiality of the same and shall not share any information regarding the suspicion or allegation to anyone other than the Senior Pastor, supervising pastor, ministry director and the appropriate investigating authorities. The Senior Pastor, or his designee, is the only person who may speak for the church in the case of public requests for information, statements, interviews, etc.

B. 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 criminal charges and a conviction or a finding of abuse or neglect against an employee, the employee shall be terminated.

If the investigation is concluded with no conviction or finding of abuse or neglect by the employee, the Senior Pastor, and Clerk of Session 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, the Clerk of Session and the supervising pastor. If the investigation is concluded with no conviction or finding of abuse or neglect 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 a conviction or finding of abuse or neglect against

the volunteer, the volunteer may not be reinstated. The outcome of the investigation shall be noted in writing in the member's volunteer application and related paperwork on file.

VI. Maintenance of the Policy

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

Ministry Covenant

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.

Name (printed)

Date

Signature

Witness (printed) Supervising Church Authority

Signature of Witness