

Northeast Presbyterian Church
Child Protection
Policy and Procedures, November 2024

1. PURPOSE

Northeast Presbyterian Church (NEPC) endeavors to provide a safe environment for the children and students who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the following practices, our goal is to protect the children and students of NEPC from danger or inappropriate behavior and to protect our staff and volunteers from false accusations.

Vision. NEPC Next Gen Ministries exists to see children and students connect to God and each other through Christ by gathering, growing and going. As we shepherd the children and students in our care, we work to:

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

2. DEFINITION OF TERMS

Child, youth, student shall be defined as any individual in grade 12 or younger. Within the context of Next Gen Ministries, a child is a boy or girl from birth through the completion of fifth (5th) grade, and a student or youth is boy or girl from sixth grade through completion of twelfth (12th) grade.

Child Abuse shall be defined as any action (or lack of action, i.e. neglect) which endangers or harms a child's physical, psychological or emotional health and development.

Employee shall be defined as any individual who is paid by NEPC on a full or part-time basis and is serving in any position involving the supervision or custody of children/youth/students.

Volunteer shall be defined as any individual who is not paid by NEPC and is serving in any position involving the supervision or custody of children/youth/students.

3. SELECTION AND SCREENING

a) All employees and volunteers who will work with NEPC's children and/or students grants NEPC the right to conduct criminal background checks, sex offender registry checks ([South Carolina Public Sex Offender Registry](#), [National Sex Offender Registry](#)) and South Carolina Child Abuse and Neglect Registry and Database checks. NEPC retains the right to conduct such checks on all employees and volunteers who are entrusted with the care and supervision of children/youth/students.

b) A prospective volunteer for Kids or Student Ministry shall also:

- Meet with the Ministry Director over the area of service.
- Be a member of NEPC in good standing for a minimum of six months.
- Training on NEPC Child Protection Policy and Procedures.
- Read and sign the NEPC Child Protection Policy signifying he or she understands and will abide by the requirements of the policy. See Appendix B.
- Complete other items deemed necessary by the Ministry Director over the area of service.

c) Volunteers under the age of 18 will comply with the same requirements as adult volunteers and staff, except background checks are not required.

4. REVIEW

a) The Ministry Director shall ensure that all requirements in section 3.b above are complete before a person begins working with children/youth/students in any capacity.

b) The Church Administrator or the Ministry Director shall screen and approve all applicants. Background check authorization forms and results will be maintained in strictest confidence on file at NEPC. Background checks of employees and volunteers shall be required every two years or repeated at any time if deemed necessary by NEPC.

c) The following results preclude an individual from service with Next Gen Ministries:

- Any felony conviction in the preceding 10 years.
- Any felony conviction involving the use of drugs.
- Any violent misdemeanor in the preceding 10 years.
- Any misdemeanor involving the use of drugs or alcohol in the preceding 5 years.
- 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 child/youth/student, child endangerment.
- Any conviction or no contest pleas for any offense involving providing alcohol or other substances to a child/youth/student and similar charges within the preceding 10 years.

d) It is the responsibility of the volunteer to report to his/her Ministry Director any event that has occurred since the last background check, such as allegations, arrests, accusations, that may preclude them from continuing in service.

4. TRAINING

a) All employees and volunteers shall complete training before they are allowed to serve. Training will serve to educate participants about the nature and prevention of child abuse and include NEPC child protection policies and procedures.

b) All employees and volunteers will be provided with a copy of the NEPC Child Protection Policy. They will also sign that they have read and understood the policy. See Appendix B.

c) Instruction and review of the NEPC Child Protection Policy will be offered annually during scheduled training sessions.

4. REPORTING

a) *Reporting Standard.* Reports shall be made when any person has reason to believe that a child/student has been, or may be, abused and/or neglected in accordance with S.C. Code Annotated § 63-7-310.

b) *Mandated Reporter.* Pastors, 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.

c) *To Whom to Report and How.*

1. If the child/student is in immediate danger, call law enforcement or 911 immediately.
2. An employee/volunteer is required to report any allegation or suspected incident of child abuse to the appropriate Ministry Director or Pastor as soon as possible after the incident. The Senior Pastor must in turn inform the Session of the incident. The reporting employee/volunteer may confirm that NEPC has reported the matter to law enforcement agencies if he/she has any doubt as to whether the matter has been so reported.
3. After a verbal report has been made, the Ministry Director will ensure that the reporting party completes a written incident report within six hours of the incident.

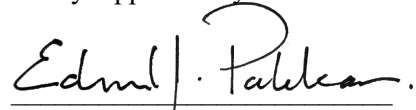
6. RESPONSE PLAN

If an incident of child abuse or neglect is alleged or suspected to have occurred on the premises of NEPC or during a church-sponsored program or activity, the following procedure shall be implemented by the Senior Pastor or his designated representative, and the appropriate Ministry Director, unless he/she is alleged to be involved.

- The parent or guardian of the child or student will be notified.
- The employee/volunteer alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will be removed immediately from working with children/youth/students pending an investigation.
- NEPC will seek legal counsel and may inform its insurance provider.
- NEPC will comply with South Carolina's Code of Laws, Title 63, Chapter 7; <https://www.scstatehouse.gov/code/t63c007.php> regarding mandatory reporting of abuse.
- If the alleged abuse involves an ordained pastor at NEPC, the Clerk of Session shall immediately contact the Palmetto Presbytery and request that the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery assign a pastor from the Presbytery to moderate a called NEPC Session meeting to apprise the NEPC Session of Special Rules Pertaining to Process Against a Minister found in the Book of Church Order.
- NEPC will cooperate fully with any investigation of the incident by state or local authorities.
- One person will be selected to act as the official spokesperson for NEPC, who will be available to the media to answer questions and to interpret the child protection policy.
- All reports of child abuse 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 an official investigation. Breach of this confidentiality by an NEPC employee/volunteer may be cause for immediate dismissal. The Senior Pastor, in consultation with the official conducting the investigation, may authorize limited additional disclosure if necessary to protect other children/youth/students from harm, 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. Any person who is found guilty of alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position with children/youth/students. Additionally, employees may be terminated, and volunteers are subject to church discipline per the PCA Book of Church Order.

7. MAINTENANCE OF THE POLICY. The Director / Pastor of Next Gen Ministries, in conjunction with the Session Next Gen Committee, shall review this policy yearly and update as appropriate.

Policy Approved by NEPC Session 11/20/2024

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Edmund J. Palekas". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "E".

Ed Palekas (Clerk of Session)

Appendices

A. Standards of Conduct / Behavior

B. Ministry Covenant

Appendix A. Standards of Conduct / Behavior NEPC Child Protection Policy and Procedures

NEPC has zero tolerance for abuse in its programs and ministry activities. It is the responsibility of every employee/volunteer in children and student ministries to act in the best interest of all children/youth/students in every program. The following requirements shall be applicable to all employees/volunteers who have contact with children/youth/students participating in any program at NEPC or an off-site NEPC sponsored event.

1. SUPERVISORY GUIDELINES

a) Safety of children.

If an employee/volunteer determines an unsafe condition exists, they shall immediately take appropriate action to protect children/youth/students.

b) Two-deep leadership.

A reasonable effort shall be made to have two non-related employees/volunteers present in the room, or nearby, with children/youth/students during NEPC activities. 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.

One-on-one contact between children/youth/students and employees/volunteers should be avoided. The church recognizes that there will be times when one employee/volunteer may be present with a group of children/youth/students or with a single child/youth/student. In those circumstances (such as Discipleship Hour or counseling), doors to the room shall remain open and windows shall remain uncovered, or the activity shall be conducted in a public space, in view of other adults or children/youth/students. Written parental consent should be obtained and on file with the Ministry Director before the contact if possible; if not, a report of the meeting shall be conveyed to the employee's supervisor following the meeting.

c) Ratio of employee/volunteers to children/youth/students.

When supervising preschool/elementary children (0 – 5th grade) the ratio of adults to children should be one adult for every ten children (1:10). When the number of preschoolers/elementary students participating in an NEPC activity exceeds ten, an additional adult is recommended for every 10 children/students.

Student Ministry (Middle and High School) events shall be supervised by one employee/volunteer for every seven students (1:7).

For activities away from NEPC, the following rules shall apply:

- Travel events shall 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 / guardian consent and a medical release form in writing.
- Exceptions to these guidelines shall be approved and documented by the Ministry Director / Pastor and parents of affected children/students shall be notified.

Appendix A. Standards of Conduct / Behavior NEPC Child Protection Policy and Procedures

2. GUIDELINES FOR APPROPRIATE AND INAPPROPRIATE CONDUCT

a) Permissible Contact

- Limited physical contact with children/youth/students, such as a pat on the back or on the head, or a handshake, is permissible. Brief hugs are permissible within sight of others. Employees/volunteers must avoid any prolonged hugs and must stop a hug immediately upon request of the child/youth/student. Touching hands, faces, shoulders and arms, placing an arm around the shoulders, sitting beside children/youth/students, holding hands during prayer, high fives and hand slapping are all appropriate.
- Child-driven interactions are acceptable in view of others; for example, if a child approaches an employee/volunteer to give a hug they don't have to turn the child away.
- Employees/volunteers should make every effort that interactions with a child are observable and interruptible.

b) Prohibited Contact

- No contact of any kind is appropriate when a child or student indicates discomfort with it or when it is imposed unnecessarily or in excessive frequency.
- Sexual abuse: Any physical contact between an employee/volunteer and a child/youth/student that would provide, or is intended to provide, any form of sexual gratification.
- Physical contact: Any physical contact between an employee/volunteer and a child/youth/student that includes giving massages, kissing, prolonged embracing, and so forth.
- Physical abuse: striking, spanking, shaking, slapping or other violent behaviors towards a child/youth/student.
- Pornography: Showing children/youth/students images that are pornographic is prohibited. Accidental viewing of pornography when in the presence of children/youth/students should be reported to the Ministry Director immediately. If employees/volunteers become aware of the existence of child pornography in the hands of a child/youth/student, they should immediately report this to the Ministry Director.
- Verbal/mental abuse: Language that is humiliating, degrading, threatening, sexual, personally intimate, related to body development or physique, or crude, regardless of how the communication was conveyed (e.g. text messages, email, phone calls, social networking sites, etc.).
- Dating: At no time shall any employee/volunteer pursue a dating relationship with a child/youth/student and should be sensitive to children/youth/students with "crushes."

3. STUDENT VOLUNTEER STANDARDS

- All student volunteers will complete the application process required of all adult volunteers and staff, except background checks are not required.
- 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.
- Student volunteers must be at least two years older than the children/students with whom they are interacting.
- Student volunteers in the church nursery must be at least 12 years old.

**Appendix A. Standards of Conduct / Behavior
NEPC Child Protection Policy and Procedures**

4. TRANSPORTATION PROCEDURES

- Adults shall be used as drivers for events that require transportation. 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. Texts are permitted but require direct verbal confirmation of the parent/guardian as the source of the text.
- 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.

5. SECURITY STANDARDS

- Preschool and elementary children will sign in at the Kid's Ministry Welcome Desk and print off appropriate tags of identification to be retained by their parents or guardian. Preschool children must have a Child Security Tag – part 1 (name tag) placed on the child's back and Part 2 (guardian tag) kept by the parent or guardian.
- Parents or other adults, not working in the church nurseries/classrooms, should not enter the rooms when dropping off their child(ren).
- Elementary children and children in the nursery classrooms should be picked up from their room at the conclusion of the event/function or other church activity. Children will be released into the care of a parent/guardian possessing the guardian tag.

**Appendix B. Ministry Covenant
NEPC Child Protection Policy and Procedures**

Employees and volunteers that will work in any area of Mothers Morning Out, Kids Ministry, or Student Ministry shall read this NEPC Child Protection Policy and acknowledge receipt and understanding of the policy. This page, once signed by the employee/volunteer shall be kept on file by the Director / Pastor of Next Gen Ministries.

<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) Ministry Director	
_____ Signature of Witness	