

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

(Approved July 30, 2015)

INTRODUCTION

Peakland United Methodist is adopting this policy to (1) reduce the risk that any child will be abused in connection with any program sponsored by our church or hosted at our church; (2) to enhance the ability of our church to respond effectively to any allegation of child abuse, and (3) to foster awareness among Peakland church and preschool staff, lay leaders and congregation of the dangers and warning signs of child abuse.

Child abuse is a growing concern among America's churches. By their very nature, religious institutions are vulnerable to incidents of child abuse. Churches tend to be trusting and open to newcomers. It is part of their mission to invite others into their fellowship. In addition, many churches struggle to find sufficient volunteers to staff nurseries, Sunday School classes and youth programs. Because of this chronic need, church leaders may hesitate to screen volunteers aggressively. Moreover, churches may offer greater opportunities for unsupervised contact with young children than most other institutions. For all these reasons, churches are at greater risk than ever for incidents of child abuse.

The purpose of this policy is to inform and motivate members, staff and child and youth ministry volunteers to prevent child abuse in the church. An effective prevention program will reduce the risk of child abuse and the legal liability of the church and its leaders and workers. However, to be meaningful this policy must be embraced and supported by all of the membership.

Definition and Types of Child Abuse and Neglect

Definition:

Child abuse refers to an act committed by a parent, caregiver, or person in a position of trust (even though he/she may not care for the child on a daily basis) which is not accidental and which harms or threatens to harm a child's physical or mental health or welfare. Under most state laws a child is defined as anyone less than 18 years of age. The following definitions and explanations are taken from the Virginia Department of Social Services.

Types of Abuse¹

Physical Abuse:

Physical abuse occurs when a caretaker creates or inflicts, threatens to create or inflict, or allows to be created or inflicted upon a child a physical injury by other than accidental means or creates a substantial risk of death, disfigurement, or impairment of bodily functions, including, but not limited to, a child who is with his parent or other person responsible for his care either (i) during the manufacture or attempted manufacture of a controlled substance or (ii) during the unlawful sale of such substance by that child's parents or other person responsible for his care, where such manufacture, or attempted manufacture or unlawful sale would constitute a felony violation. (22 VAC 40-705-30 A)

Examples: asphyxiation; bone fracture; brain damage, skull fracture, subdural hematoma; burns, scalding; cuts, bruises, welts, abrasions; internal injuries, poisoning; sprains, dislocations; gunshot or stabbing wounds.

Physical Neglect:

Physical neglect occurs when there is the failure to provide food, clothing, shelter, or supervision for a child to the extent that the child's health or safety is endangered. This also includes abandonment and situations where the parent or caretaker's own incapacitating behavior or

¹ http://www.dss.virginia.gov/files/division/dfs/cps/intro_page/manuals/07-2011/section_2_definitions_of_abuse_and_neglect.pdf

absence prevents or severely limits the performing of child caring tasks. This also includes a child under the age of 18 whose parent or other person responsible for his care knowingly leaves the child alone in the same dwelling as a person, not related by blood or marriage, who has been convicted of an offense against a minor for which registration is required as a violent sexual offender. (22 VAC 40-705-30 B). Physical neglect may include multiple occurrences or a one-time critical or severe event that results in a threat to health or safety. (22 VAC 40-705-30 B1) Examples: abandonment, inadequate supervision, inadequate clothing, inadequate shelter, inadequate personal hygiene, inadequate food, malnutrition.

Medical Neglect

Medical neglect occurs when there is a failure by the caretaker to obtain and or follow through with a complete regiment of medical, mental or dental care for a condition which if untreated could result in illness or development delays. However a decision by parents or other persons legally responsible for the child to refuse a particular medical treatment for a child with life-threatening condition shall not be deemed a refusal to provide necessary care if (i) such decision is made jointly by the parents or other person legally responsible for the child and the child; (ii) the child has reached 14 years of age and is sufficiently mature to have an informed opinion on the subject of his medical treatment; (iii) the parents or other person legally responsible for the child and the child have considered alternative treatment options; and (iv) the parents or other person legally responsible for the child and the child believe in good faith that such decision is in the child's best interest. Medical neglect also includes withholding of medically indicated treatment. (22 VAC 40-705-30 C).

Examples: inadequate support and maintaining of necessary medical care, inadequate preventive health care, failure to obtain necessary emergency care or treatment, failure to provide or allow necessary treatment or care for a child medically at risk with a diagnosed disabling or chronic condition or disease.

Mental Abuse/Neglect:

Mental abuse or neglect occurs when a caretaker creates or inflicts, threatens to create or inflict, or allows to be created or inflicted upon such child a mental injury by other than accidental means or creates a substantial risk of impairment of mental functions. (22 VAC 40-705-30 D).

Examples: overprotection, ignoring, indifference, rigidity, chaotic lifestyle, bizarre discipline, behavior that is violent or hostile.

Sexual Abuse:

Sexual abuse occurs when there is any act of sexual exploitation or any sexual act upon a child in violation of the law which is committed or allowed to be committed by the child's parents or other persons responsible for the care of the child. (22 VAC 40-705-30 E).

Examples: sexual exploitation, indecent solicitation or exposure, sexual molestation, intercourse or sodomy

A discussion of child abuse warning signs will be an important part of the annual training.

Peakland's child abuse prevention policy includes four elements:

- A) Screening and selection
- B) Supervision and training
- C) Reporting obligations
- D) Response procedures

Each element of Peakland's policy is discussed below.

SCREENING AND SELECTION

1. Extended Screening – This procedure applies to all paid Peakland staff and all “scheduled volunteers.” “Scheduled volunteers” are persons who supervise or have custody of minors, on a scheduled or recurring basis, in any program affiliated with Peakland. Extended screening is required for, but not limited to:

- Child care providers engaged by the church for church sponsored events
 - Peakland Preschool teachers and personnel
 - Parents who are scheduled to assist in Peakland Preschool classes or events
 - Sunday School teachers of children and youth (school year and summer)
 - Parents scheduled for extended session duty
 - Mentors of prospective confirmands
 - Scheduled youth ministry leaders
- a) Church & Preschool Staff – Before hiring any paid worker for a position which includes supervision or custody of minors in any program affiliated with Peakland, the responsible staff person(s) at Peakland will:
- 1) Ascertain and document any similar programs with which the applicant has previously been associated;
 - 2) Obtain a completed employment application or resume as deemed appropriate by Staff-Parish Relations Committee or the Preschool Board;
 - 3) Obtain a completed Child Protection Policy (CPP) screening form (see Appendix A);
 - 4) Personally interview the applicant and explain this policy (documentation of interview conducted to be filed);
 - 5) Contact the applicant’s references and record comments; and
 - 6) Obtain a criminal records check on the applicant.
- b) Church Volunteers – Before utilizing the services of a “scheduled volunteer,” the responsible staff person or lay volunteer coordinator at Peakland will:
- 1) Ascertain that the person has been a member or actively associated with programs at Peakland for a minimum of six months;
 - 2) Confirm that the volunteer has been given a copy of this policy, has reviewed it and preferably has attended a training session where the policy was explained and discussed;
 - i. Obtain a completed CPP screening form;
 - ii. Interview the volunteer in person;
 - iii. If has not attended a training, will be notified of the next scheduled training.
 - 3) References complete Online Recommendation Form;
 - 4) Background Screening completed using ScreenOne.²
- c) Preschool Volunteers
- 1) Volunteers will be limited to parents and primary caregivers and be approved by the Director and/or Associate Director (this includes Room Parents);
 - 2) All volunteers will fill out a CPP screening form;
 - 3) Extended family members who wish to volunteer will be interviewed by the Director or Associate Director and fill out a CPP screening form;
 - 4) The Peakland Preschool office will be responsible for maintaining Preschool volunteer CPP screening forms.

2. Conditions – Following this screening process and maintaining this policy, staff and volunteer workers are eligible to work with any children or youth ministry event as approved by the supervising staff member.

- a) Screening Forms – One CPP Screening Form covers all volunteer opportunities. A volunteer will not be asked to fill out the form again, unless the policy changes.
- 1) Completed CPP screening forms must be signed by the worker and forwarded to the staff person responsible for the area in which the worker supervises minors. Failure to sign the

² <http://www.vaumc.org/SafeSanctuaries>

form will disqualify the candidate. CPP screening forms will be treated as confidential and kept in the preschool or church office.

- 2) Annual Training must be completed by each worker and volunteer. Proper notification must be made by the Trainer and/or Associate Minister.
- b) Cancelling Events – If there is not an appropriate number of screened adult volunteers scheduled for a children or youth ministry event, the event will be cancelled.
- c) Criminal Misconduct – Persons with a history of criminal misconduct are not eligible and will not be engaged, as paid or volunteer workers, to work with minors in any program affiliated with Peakland.
- d) Additional Requirements – Peakland United Methodist reserves the right to request additional information, training, or documentation as deemed appropriate.

SUPERVISION AND TRAINING

Exercising care in the selection of volunteers is important but not sufficient to ensure that child abuse will not occur in the church. Equally important is appropriate supervision of child care and youth workers. The procedures discussed below are being implemented to establish safe and holy environments for children and youth and for the protection of all volunteers.

The “two adult” rule: At least two adult volunteers should be present during all church activities involving one or more minors whenever possible. An adult is anyone at least 18 years old, who has gone through the screening process and the training. This policy recognizes that prospective confirmands and their mentors have a unique relationship that may be fostered by private conversations. However, such conversations should, when possible, take place within sight of others (such as pairs of people scattered around a room or in a public space like a coffee shop). Similarly, we recognize that our clergy may be called upon to counsel minors in certain situations. These counseling sessions should be within sight of others in rooms with doors open or in an office with a window in the door, or in a public space (i.e. coffee shop).

Ratios³: The following ratios will be maintained during children and youth ministry events and activities, with a minimum of two adults always present. When the group is mixed gender, there will be one male and one female.

Age	Adult to Child/Youth
0-1	1:4
2	1:8
3-4	1:10
5-11	1:12
12-18	1:14

Sunday School: During the Sunday school hour, one teacher may be in a classroom of children, with the doors open, while maintaining ratios. The Children’s Ministry Floater will float between classrooms, providing assistance as needed. The Children’s Ministry Floater will be responsible for check-in and check-out of children from Sunday school and for providing information cards to new children. A designated lay or staff person may do random walk throughs.

Overnight Trips and Activities: For overnight trips or activities off church premises, at least three screened and trained adults should be present of which 2 are unrelated, while maintaining approved ratios. If the activities include boys and girls at least one male and one female adult should be present. Adult volunteers should be present and participate in all approved activities.

Drivers⁴: Under no circumstances should anyone under the age of 21 be allowed to drive children or youth during church-sponsored outings or overnights. When transporting participants to off-site activities, no

³ These numbers are based on the Religious Exempt status of the Virginia Department of Social Services

⁴ “Guidelines for Local Church Adult Chaperones with Children”; Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church

automobile will contain only one adult (driver) and one child or youth, this includes confirmation mentors and students. Automobiles will contain either one adult driver and two or more participants or two adults and any number of children, within the seat belt limitations of the vehicle. Use of child safety seats which meet federal standards is required for children under 6 years of age.

Conduct CPP training annually: At least once a year CPP training should be held which includes a discussion of this policy and the reasons why it is so important to the church. Initially, screened volunteers should attend a training in person at the church, and may renew their training annually online (information to be provided at the initial training). The training will include a review of the criminal sanctions applicable in Virginia to abusive actions targeting minors (Virginia Code Section 63.1-248.2). Because abusive actions change over time, screened volunteers will be asked to attend an in-person training session every three years to receive new information.

Forms: Each year, parents will be asked to fill out an information card about their children or youth, which includes emergency contacts in the event that there is an emergency and the parents cannot be reached. Parents whose children or youth attend an event for the first time will be asked to fill out an information card upon arrival. Permission slips must be filled out by parents of children and youth attending events and returned for children and youth to participate in activities and overnights off site. For trips and outings, a Health/Emergency Form must be filled out. In addition, if medication is required during the outing or overnight trip, a Medication Form must be filled out by the parents or primary caregiver. These forms will be maintained along with the volunteer screening forms.

Schedule adequate personnel: Programs that involve children and youth should be staffed to adhere to the two-adult rule and the approved ratios. Adult supervision should be maintained before and after events until all children or youth are in the custody of their parents or another responsible adult with the parents' permission. If a parent does not arrive thirty minutes after an event or program ends, the parent will be called by the event's supervisor. If parent is not reachable, the emergency contacts will be called. If scheduled workers do not arrive, classes or other groups should be combined to ensure the presence of two adults.

Non-Profit Organizations: Non-profit organizations providing programming for children or youth that use Peakland for their programs must provide evidence that their volunteers have gone through a similar screening process. If not, these volunteers will go through Peakland's volunteer screening process. In order to have access to the building, the contact person for these organizations should provide the proper documentation to the Business Manager.

Review of Policy: This policy will be reviewed annually by the Safe Sanctuaries Task Force, with recommendations made as needed to the Common Table.

REPORTING OBLIGATIONS

An effective reporting system is essential to preventing child abuse. Child molesters are less likely to remain in a church where workers are trained to spot symptoms of child abuse and report suspicious activities or behavior. Church workers, parents and members should not hesitate to report concerns to church authorities. Similarly, church staff should take all reports seriously and treat each with care and discretion. Any inappropriate conduct or relationships between church or preschool staff, adult volunteers and children or youth must be reported immediately in accordance with the reporting procedures outlined below.

All church and preschool staff and volunteers should be aware that Virginia law requires certain persons to report suspected cases of child abuse to the appropriate authorities. Pursuant to Section 63.1-248.3 of the Virginia Code, "any teacher, or other person employed in a public or private school, kindergarten or nursery school" or "any person associated with or employed by any private organization responsible for the care, custody or control of children" who has any reason to suspect that a child is abused or neglected must report the matter immediately.

Pursuant to this policy, any church or preschool staff member, volunteer, or other adult participant in any Peakland sponsored program involving children or youth must report any incident, activity, behavior or evidence which comes to his or her attention which reasonably appears to indicate that child abuse has occurred or may occur in connection with any program associated with Peakland. Persons making reports will not be identified, without their permission, except as necessary in connection with any potential or pending legal action or criminal investigation.

With respect to matters involving the Peakland Preschool, reports should be made to the Preschool Director (or Associate Director, if warranted) who will then make a report to the Clergy (or District Superintendent, if warranted). With respect to all other matters, reports should be made directly to the Clergy (or District Superintendent, if warranted). If an allegation involves a clergy person, the matter should be reported to the District Superintendent.

RESPONSE TO ALLEGATIONS

As soon as the clergy person receives a report of suspected child abuse he or she will immediately contact one of the following agencies and the District Superintendent –

- Lynchburg Department of Human Services – 847-1354 or 847-1531
- Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline – 800-552-7096 (7 days/week, 24 hours/day)

Once the clergy person has made the report he or she will convene a Response Team of the following people –

- Pastor (or District Superintendent)
- Chairperson of the Common Table
- Chairperson of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee
- Children or Youth Program Staff (if appropriate)
- Preschool Director or Associate Director (if a preschool incident)

The Response Team will assist the notified agency under the agency's direction. In addition, and unless directed otherwise, the Response team will –

- Notify the parents of the child or children involved.
- Select a spokesperson to handle inquiries in a discrete, informed and diplomatic way.
- Document all matters relating to the reported incident and accumulate all files related to the hiring or selection of the staff or volunteer involved.
- Report the incident to Peakland's insurance carrier and legal counsel.

If a report of child abuse involving Peakland is made, it is essential that everyone involved handle the matter as promptly, thoroughly and discretely as possible. The following guideline principles will apply –

- All allegations will be taken seriously.
- Each report will be handled forthrightly with due respect for people's privacy and confidentiality.
- Victims will be loved, cared for and not held responsible in any way.
- Full cooperation will be given to church and civil authorities under the guidance of Peakland's legal counsel.

Both the victim and the accused will be treated fairly and with dignity. The care and safety of the child or youth victim is the first priority. The accused should not be confronted until the child's safety has been ensured. As soon as a report is made, the accused should be temporarily removed from his or her duties pending resolution of the matter. Paid church and preschool staff may be suspended with or without pay as determined by the Common Table.

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Child Protection Policy – Appendix A

**PEAKLAND UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
STAFF / VOLUNTEER SCREENING FORM**

Please answer the following, sign and date. Return to the church office to indicate you have read, understand and accept the “Child Abuse Prevention Policy and Procedures” of Peakland United Methodist Church

NAME _____
ADDRESS _____
HOME PHONE _____

Name and location (city, state) of the church/es you have attended regularly during the past five years, whether you were a member or constituent, and the length of time you spent in each church:

List previous non-church work involving children or youth during the past five years (names, locations):

Your current driver’s license number _____

References (other than relatives):

Name _____
Email _____
Phone _____

Name _____
Email _____
Phone _____

I have read and understand the policy and agree to abide by it. I have no convictions for child abuse or expungements of such convictions. I authorize and release any references or church/es listed to give you any information (including opinions) that they may have regarding my work with children or youth.

YOUR SIGNATURE

DATE

Your signature is required for you to be considered as a staff member or volunteer. Peakland United Methodist reserves the right to request additional information, training, or documentation as deemed appropriate.