

**WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH**

Alexandria, VA

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

November 2017

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section 1	Purpose
Section 2	Definitions
Section 3	Accountability
Section 4	Supervision and Standards of Conduct
Section 5	Reporting Abuse
Section 6	Annual Policy Review
Appendix	A. Volunteer Application for Work with Children and Youth
	B. Child Protection Policy Acceptance Form

Section 1 – Purpose

Purpose

As members of Westminster Presbyterian Church (WPC), we are called to create a loving community of faith that strives to ensure the welfare of its participants. Therefore, we are committed to the protection of all children and youth participating in the activities and programs of WPC. Abuse, exploitation, or harassment in any form – physical, emotional, or sexual – will not be tolerated.

WPC cannot, nor can any institution or organization, absolutely guarantee that no harm will befall a child entrusted to its care. However, Westminster can, through adherence to this policy, create an environment of accountability and trust. It will make every effort to ensure that persons placed in positions of responsibility with respect to the children of the church are persons deserving of that trust and responsibility.

Our task as a community of faith is to demonstrate that we can be trustworthy; we can be a place where children are not betrayed; and where the value of children and adults sharing life and faith together is treasured.

In addition to this policy, all clergy are subject to the National Capital Presbytery Clergy Sexual Misconduct Policy.

Section 2 - Definitions

Definitions

Child: For purposes of this policy, the terms “child”, “children” or “minors” mean those of less than eighteen (18) years of age. Children may also be designated into three categories based on age: **Young Children** (newborn through Pre-K); **Elementary Children** (persons in kindergarten through grade five); and **Youth** (persons in grade six through grade 12 or a person 18 years to 21 years-old that is mentally or physically disabled).

Child Abuse: An abused or neglected child means any child whose parent(s) or other person responsible for his/her care creates or inflicts, threatens to create or inflict, or allows to be created or inflicted upon such child a physical or mental injury by other than accidental means, or creates a substantial risk of death, disfigurement or impairment of bodily or mental functions.

Child Sexual Abuse: Inappropriately exposing or subjecting a child to sexual contact, activity or behavior. In general, it includes any form of sexual contact or exploitation in which a minor is being used for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator (adult or minor). This behavior is always considered forced when the interaction involves a child and an adult, whether or not the child has consented.

Westminster Presbyterian Church – Child Protection Policy

Communications: Any communication between a minor and WPC staff or volunteer via analog or digital communications (e.g., email, phone, texting, Skype, social network, postal mail, etc.).

CPP: The Child Protection Policy.

CPPC: The Child Protection Policy Committee (CPPC) is responsible for dealing with any concerns about the protection of minors. The Committee shall include the Pastor/Head of Staff, Associate Pastor(s), the Clerk of Session, the Business Administrator, the Director of Children’s Ministry, and the Chair of the Christian Education Committee. The CPPC shall annually review and update (as needed) the CPP. The Associate Pastor for Christian Formation will serve as Chair of the CPPC and coordinate annual reviews of the CPP.

Employee: A person who is hired or called to work for WPC for salary or wages.

Volunteer: A person who provides service to WPC without monetary compensation and has met the following criteria: (1) an active participant in the life of Westminster for six months, and (2) has been cleared by the application and criminal background check process to work with children. Volunteers working in programs in the community which are supervised or coordinated by WPC are exempt from the 6-month participation requirement.

Supervision: The direct observation, control, and visual monitoring of activities.

WPC: Westminster Presbyterian Church including the Westminster Weekday Preschool.

Section 3 – Accountability

The Child Protection Policy Committee, working with the Christian Education Committee, shall assume responsibility for the Child Protection Policy. Such responsibility includes supervision and implementation of the policy as well as education and training. In order to create the safest possible environment at Westminster, the following practices will be observed.

Recruitment

1.) Screening

- A.) The Child Protection Policy Committee (CPPC) shall require all paid and volunteer helpers who are in positions of trust with children and youth to complete an application form with criminal background check authorization, read the church's Child Protection Policy, and sign a form indicating that they have read the policy and agree to abide by it. Such applications should be completed and signed before persons begin to serve or as soon as possible thereafter. Background checks will be repeated before they are five years old or after a person has left the area for a substantial time and then moved back.
- B.) The CPPC shall use the "Westminster Presbyterian Church Volunteer Application for Work with Children" form when conducting criminal background checks, paying attention to the questions concerning criminal offense, child neglect, physical/sexual abuse, sexual harassment or misconduct, viewing adult or child pornography, or misconduct against children.
- C.) What constitutes a disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by the CPPC in its sole discretion on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. Convictions, pending charges and credible allegations of an offense involving children and/or for offenses involving violence, indecency, and dishonesty will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction or job dismissal on the application form for the aforementioned reasons will also be a disqualifying event.
- D.) The Business Administrator or Pastors will contact volunteers/applicants regarding any perceived problems that would potentially prohibit their work, either in paid or volunteer capacities.

2.) Staff and Volunteer Training

- A.) Communication and an explanation of the Child Protection Policy will be provided annually in all training and orientation programs to those who are in positions of trust with children and youth.

Westminster Presbyterian Church – Child Protection Policy

- B.) The Head of Staff will be responsible for arranging staff training, which will include an annual review of Westminster's policies and procedures, as well as signs of sexual abuse and child abuse.
- C.) All church officers will be required annually to review the Child Protection Policy and sign the Acceptance Form.

Member Awareness

1.) Congregational Outreach

- A.) The congregation shall be informed of this policy (and subsequent updates) upon its adoption by the session.
- B.) The policy shall be widely disseminated, especially after updates through any or all of the following channels -- newsletter, website, announcements, special presentations/classes, and new member packets.
- C.) A copy of this policy shall be provided to families with children, to each employee and volunteer participating in any program or activity involving children.
- D.) A copy of this policy shall be made available on the WPC website.
- E.) A copy of this policy shall be posted in the church library as well as the church office.

Section 4 – Standards of Conduct and Supervision

Personal Conduct

- 1.) Paid and volunteer adults and youth helpers shall not touch or interact with children in any way that is intended or could be reasonably construed to be sexually stimulating or physically abusive.
- 2.) Care must also be taken that consenting adults or youth do not act in a sexual way during any Church activity.
- 3.) Common expressions of affection (hugs), affirmation (pat on the back), support (prayer), or physical caretaking (diapers, etc.) are appropriate as long as respect for others personal wishes about being touched are honored, are not excessive, or imposed upon another individual.
- 4.) Paid and volunteer adults and youth working with children and youth are also tasked with guarding the physical and emotional safety of those in their care and to be aware of signs indicating neglect of the child's well-being.
- 5.) Paid and volunteer adults and youth helpers shall follow not only the "letter" of this policy document, but also the "spirit" of this policy document.

Supervision

- 1.) **Two-Adult Rule.** A minimum of two adult helpers will be in attendance at all times for activities and classes for children on church grounds. We do not allow a minor to be alone with one adult on our premises or in any sponsored activity. Exceptions may be made to this rule in counseling and pastoral care situations with the pastors in which Presbytery guidelines are to be followed, or when professional therapists or medical personnel are working with a child. One adult may accompany children to the bathroom following the guidelines set forth in Section 3 below.
- 2.) **Open Classrooms.** Classroom doors without windows shall remain open at all times. Except in an emergency lock-down situation, doors should never be locked while persons are inside the room. Superintendents should always have physical and visual access to rooms.
- 3.) **Restroom Guidelines.** For the protection of all, helpers should never be alone with a Young- or Elementary-aged child in a restroom with the door closed and never be in a closed restroom stall with a child of any age. Restroom doors on the third floor shall remain open during educational hours.

Westminster Presbyterian Church – Child Protection Policy

- A.) Children six years of age and younger should utilize a classroom restroom if one is available. If a classroom restroom is not available, helpers should escort more than one child to the hallway bathroom.
- 4.) **Transportation.** Other than in special circumstances described below, children shall be transported in groups rather than alone. A child's parent or guardian may give permission for an unaccompanied adult to drive a single child or children in a church-sponsored activity. Parental permission should be obtained in writing (e.g., letter or electronic communications). This policy is not intended to prohibit staff or volunteers from offering a ride home to children in emergency situations. The adult leader shall make a reasonable attempt to contact parents prior to providing the ride. If unable to reach parents, he/she will notify another responsible adult of the situation.
- 5.) **Classroom Discipline.** In no case are teachers or helpers permitted to physically or verbally abuse a child. All teachers and helpers will adhere to the following CPPC Classroom Discipline Guidelines in order to maintain order:
- A.) If a child is behaving inappropriately, the teacher/helper will tell the child specifically what he/she is doing that is not acceptable, and state what the expected behavior is, e.g. "We do not throw blocks. We use blocks for building." If this is not effective, the child should be guided to another activity.
- B.) If inappropriate behavior continues, the child may be placed in an area in the classroom where he/she will play alone, away from the other students for a brief period of time.
- C.) If the child's disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, a teacher or helper will notify the Director of Children's Ministries, who will talk with the child and work with the child's parents.
- 6.) **Off-Campus Events.** Westminster shall when possible uphold a "one adult to seven children of the same gender" ratio for overnight trips (and for on-campus overnight events).
- A.) In no circumstance is one adult (other than the parent or guardian) to take a child or children on an overnight outing alone.
- B.) Male and female youth will sleep in separate rooms. Female staff will supervise female minors in their sleeping quarters and male staff will supervise male minors in separate sleeping quarters. In situations where all youth are sleeping in one large room, male and female sleeping areas will be kept separate. In no circumstance is one adult (other than the parent or guardian of that child) permitted to be in separate sleeping quarters with one child.
- C.) Spouse or significant others may not be the sole supervisors for an overnight activity.

- 7.) **Gifts.** Any adult wanting to provide a gift to an individual child must obtain permission from the child's parent, and either the Director of Children's Ministry or the Associate Pastor for that child's age group.

Section 5 – Reporting of Child Abuse or Misconduct

Reporting of Child Abuse or Misconduct

- 1.) For purposes of this policy, “child abuse or misconduct” means any action (or lack of action) by an adult or another child who, by other than accidental means, (1) inflicts, endangers or harms, (2) threatens to inflict, endanger or harm, or (3) allows to be inflicted, endangered or harmed, a child's physical, psychological or emotional health and development.

Child abuse occurs in different ways and may include, but is not limited to, the following:

- **Physical abuse** – any physical injury to a child which is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, bullying, etc.
- **Emotional abuse** – emotional injury when the child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.
- **Sexual abuse** – any form of sexual contact or exploitation in which a child is being used for sexual stimulation of the perpetrator. It may be violent or non-violent and includes behaviors that involve touching aspects (including but not limited to fondling, oral, genital and anal penetration, intercourse, rape) and non-touching aspects (including but not limited to verbal comments, pornographic pictures or videos, obscene electronic communications, e.g., phone call, text messaging; exhibitionism and allowing children to witness sexual activity).
- **Neglect** – purposefully depriving a child of their essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, medical care and supervision. This also includes a child left alone in the same dwelling as a person (1) to whom the child is not related by blood, and (2) who has a known conviction for an offense against a minor and (3) is required to be registered as a violent sexual offender under Virginia law.

2.) Reporting Procedures

Westminster Presbyterian Church – Child Protection Policy

- A.) A person associated with or employed by the Church who has reason to believe that abuse or misconduct as defined by this policy is occurring or has occurred shall immediately, within 72 hours, report such information to the following three entities: (1) any member of the internal Child Protection Policy Committee (CPPC), (2) the City of Alexandria Police Department (703-746-4444) and (3) the City of Alexandria Department of Community and Human Services (Child Abuse & Neglect Complaints 24-Hour Number 703-746-5800.)
- B.) In addition to the above notifications, if the alleged offender is an ordained clergy member, the report shall be made to the Clerk of Session, who will notify the Stated Clerk of the National Capital Presbytery as required in the Presbytery's Sexual Misconduct Policy. It is Westminster's policy to report all allegations to the Stated Clerk of the National Capital Presbytery.
- C.) In addition to the previously listed notifications, it is Westminster's policy that the CPPC will also immediately report any allegations of abuse or misconduct involving children to the parents and/or guardian of the child or children involved, unless it is the parent and/or guardian who are suspected of abuse or misconduct.
- D.) Anyone with a concern about the welfare of a child is encouraged to report that concern to a member of the CPPC.

Section 6 – Annual Policy Review

Policy Review and Revisions

- 1.) The CPPC shall review and make revisions to the Child Protection Policy as necessary on an annual basis.

Approved by Session May 23, 2012

Revised and Approved December 5, 2012

Revised and Approved May 28, 2014

Revised and Approved October 28, 2015

Revised and Approved November 29, 2017

Appendix A –Volunteer Application for Work with Children & Youth

**Westminster Presbyterian Church
Volunteer Application for Work with Children & Youth**

THIS APPLICATION IS A CONFIDENTIAL, MANDATORY PART OF A PROCESS TO HELP THE CHURCH PROVIDE A SAFE, NURTURING ENVIRONMENT FOR OUR CHILDREN AND YOUTH. PERSONS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SUPERVISION AND CARE OF OUR CHILDREN ARE IN A SPECIAL POSITION OF TRUST AND CONFIDENCE.

THEREFORE, PERSONS WHO WORK WITH CHILDREN MUST COMPLETE THIS APPLICATION.

PERSONAL INFORMATION

FULL NAME _____ DATE OF BIRTH _____

SOCIAL SECURITY # _____

ADDRESS _____

TELEPHONE # (H) _____ (W) _____ (C) _____

EMAIL: _____

STATES WHERE YOU HAVE RESIDED FOR THE LAST SEVEN YEARS: _____

- 1. ARE YOU 18 YEARS OR OLDER? YES NO
- 2. HAVE YOU EVER BEEN CONVICTED OR CHARGED WITH ANY CRIMINAL OFFENSE (EXCLUDING PARKING TICKETS)? YES NO
- 3. HAVE YOU PLEADED GUILTY OR NO CONTEST TO ANY CRIMINAL OFFENSE? YES NO
- 4. HAVE YOU EVER BEEN CHARGED WITH OR CONVICTED OF CHILD NEGLECT OR PHYSICAL/SEXUAL ABUSE INVOLVING CHILDREN OR ADULTS? YES NO
- 5. HAVE YOU PLEADED GUILTY OR NO CONTEST TO ANY NEGLECT OR ABUSE OFFENSE? YES NO
- 6. HAVE ANY COMPLAINTS OR ALLEGATIONS OF MISCONDUCT INVOLVING CHILDREN EVER BEEN MADE AGAINST YOU? YES NO
- 7. HAVE YOU EVER LEFT OR BEEN ASKED TO LEAVE A VOLUNTEER OR PAID POSITION BECAUSE OF CHARGES OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT OR SEXUAL MISCONDUCT? YES NO
- 8. HAVE YOU EVER LEFT OR BEEN ASKED TO LEAVE A VOLUNTEER OR PAID POSITION BECAUSE OF VIEWING ADULT OR CHILD PORNOGRAPHY? YES NO

IF ANSWER IS YES FOR QUESTIONS 2-8, PLEASE EXPLAIN:

I CERTIFY THAT THE INFORMATION I HAVE PROVIDED IS TRUE AND CORRECT. IF IT IS FOUND THAT THE ANSWERS GIVEN ARE UNTRUE, I UNDERSTAND IT MAY BE GROUNDS FOR DISQUALIFICATION FOR VOLUNTEER SERVICE. I ALSO AUTHORIZE WPC TO CONDUCT A CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECK.

APPLICANT'S SIGNATURE: _____

DATE: _____

Appendix B – Child Protection Policy Acceptance Form

**Westminster Presbyterian Church
Child Protection Policy Acceptance Form**

I, _____(print name), accept the responsibility to nurture the Christian faith and well-being of the children and youth of Westminster Presbyterian Church, and to care for them as Christ cares for me.

"I... will tend the flock of God that is in my charge, exercising the oversight ... willingly, as God would have me do it... (I Peter 5:2).

I have read the Westminster Presbyterian Church Child Protection Policy and I agree to abide by it. I hereby affirm that I have not been charged with, been convicted of, or left a paid or volunteer position for reasons related to criminal offense, child neglect, physical/sexual abuse, sexual harassment or misconduct, viewing adult or child pornography, or misconduct against children. I further affirm that I am not a registered sex offender.

Applicant's Signature: _____

Date: _____