

WPC Youth Protection Policy

General Purpose Statement

Westminster Presbyterian Church seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for youth who participate in programs and activities sponsored by our organization or by approved entities using our space. By implementing the below practices, our goal is to protect the youth participating in events at Westminster Presbyterian Church (hereafter know as WPC) from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteers (workers) from false accusations.

Definitions

For purposes of this policy, the term “youth” or “youths” include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years. The term “worker” includes both paid and unpaid persons who work with children. The term “volunteer” means anyone not employed by WPC who is involved in activities of any kind involving minors.

By extension, this policy includes volunteers in our Boy & Girl Scout programs. Both the BSA & GSA have their own rigorous youth protection programs, and scouting volunteers must comply with their respective program’s requirements in lieu of this policy. Upon request of WPC, each of these volunteers must provide proof of valid, unexpired Youth Protection Training.

Westminster is a member of the Muskingum Valley Presbytery (hereafter known as MVP).

Selection of Workers/Volunteers

All persons who desire to work with the youth participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes the following:

a) **Six Month Rule**

No person will be considered for any **volunteer** position involving contact with youth until they have been involved with a Presbyterian congregation within the bounds of the MVP for a minimum of six (6) months. This time of interaction between our leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation and suitability of the applicant for working with youth.

b) **Written Application**

All persons seeking to work with youth must complete and sign a written application in a form to be supplied by WPC. The application will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with youth, previous congregation affiliation, reference and employment information, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. This form will also include authorization for background check. The application form will be maintained in confidence on file at the WPC office.

c) **Personal Interview**

Upon completion of the application, a face-to-face interview may be scheduled with the applicant to discuss their suitability for the position.

d) **Reference Checks**

Before an applicant is permitted to work with youth, at least two of the applicants’ references will be checked. These references should be of an institutional nature

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rather than personal or family references, preferably from organizations where the applicant has worked with youth in the past. Documentation of the reference checks will be maintained in confidence on file at the WPC office.

e) **Criminal Background Check**

Volunteers and staff must have the following background checks completed before working with youth.

- A. State criminal records
- B. State sexual abuse
- C. FBI criminal records check

Before a background check can be run, prospective workers need to fill out the written application and sign an authorization form allowing WPC to run the check. If an individual declines to sign the authorization form, they will be unable to work with youth.

A disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with youth will be determined by the Personnel Committee of WPC—on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. Generally, convictions for an offense involving children/youth and/or for offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to the mission of the church will preclude someone from being permitted to work with youth. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying event. The background check authorization form and results will be maintained in confidence on file.

Rule of Three

It is our goal that a minimum of two unrelated adult workers will be in attendance at all times when youth are being supervised during WPC programs and activities, including childcare during church services. However, some youth activities may have only one adult leader in attendance during the activity session. In these instances, doors to the room in which the activity is taking place should remain open and there should be no fewer than two youth with the adult leader. WPC does not allow minors to be alone with one adult on our premises or in any sponsored activity unless in a counseling situation.

Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

For purposes of this policy, “child abuse” is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child or youth’s physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes the following:

- **Physical abuse** – any physical injury to a youth that is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.
- **Emotional abuse** – emotional injury when the youth is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.
- **Sexual abuse** – any sexual activity between a youth and an adult or between a youth and another youth at least four years older than the victim, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.
- **Neglect** – depriving a youth of their essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

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Childcare workers may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect of the youths under our care. In the event that an individual involved in the care of youths at a WPC-sponsored event or activity becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a youth under their care, this should be reported immediately to the person primarily responsible for the event **and** to the WPC pastor for further action, including reporting to authorities as may be mandated by state law.

In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred during our sponsored programs or activities, the following procedure shall be followed:

1. The parent or guardian of the youth will be notified.
2. The worker or church member alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave pending an investigation and instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation. They will be instructed to have no contact with the victim or with witnesses.
3. All allegations of abuse should be reported to the civil authorities in addition to the MVP, and the organization will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists. The organization will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities.
4. The insurance company will be notified, and the organization will complete an incident report. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company.
5. The clerk of session or pastor shall serve as the spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect. The advice of legal counsel will be sought before responding to media inquiries or releasing information about the situation to the congregation. All other representatives of the organization shall refrain from speaking to the media.
6. A pastoral visit will be arranged for those who desire it. This should be for the purpose of providing pastoral support during the time of crisis and not for the purpose of investigating the incident or influencing the investigation.
7. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position working with children or youth.

Open Door Policy

Classroom doors should remain open unless there is a window in the door or a side window beside it. Doors should never be locked while people are inside the room.

Teenage Workers

WPC recognizes there may be times when it is necessary or desirable to use babysitters (paid or volunteer) who are themselves under age 18 to assist in caring for children during programs or activities. The following guidelines apply to teenage workers:

- Must be at least age 14 and at least 4 years older than the oldest child being cared for;

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- Must be screened as specified above; and
- Must be under the supervision of an adult.

Drivers for Youth Activities

Those providing transportation for youth activities, sponsored or co-sponsored by WPC, shall be at least 21 years of age and have a “clean” driving record for the current year and the previous three years. No unrelated youth shall be alone with the driver at any time.

Check-in/Check-out Procedure

We may require a security check-in/check-out procedure for various activities. In these circumstances, the child will be signed in by a parent or guardian, who will receive a “child check” for the child similar to a claim check. The parent or guardian must present the “child check” in order to sign out the child from our care. In the event that a parent or guardian is unable to present the “child check,” the person primarily responsible for the event will be contacted. The person primarily responsible for the event will be responsible for releasing the child to the care of a parent or guardian after discussing the surrounding circumstances with the parent or guardian.

Sick Youth Policy

It is WPC’s desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all of the youth at WPC events or activities. Parent and guardians are encouraged to be considerate of other youths when deciding whether to place a youth under our care. In general, youth with the following symptoms should NOT be dropped off:

- Fever, diarrhea, or vomiting within the last 48 hours;
- Green or yellow runny nose;
- Eye or skin infections; and/or
- Other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease.

Youth who are observed by our workers to be ill will be separated from other youths and the parent or guardian will be contacted to request that the youth be picked up for the day.

Medications Policy

It is the policy of the WPC not to administer either prescription or non-prescription medications to the youth under our care. Medications should be administered at home. Parents are reminded of our sick youth policy.

Exceptions to the medications policy may be granted by parents or guardians of youth with potentially life-threatening conditions (such as asthma or severe allergic reactions). Parents or guardians of such youth should address their situation with the person primarily responsible for the event and the person who will be immediately responsible to develop a plan of action for the youth.

Discipline Policy

It is the policy of the WPC not to administer corporal punishment, even if parents or guardians have suggested or given permission for it. There shall be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other

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physical discipline of youth. Workers should consult with the person primarily responsible for the event if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

Restroom Guidelines

Children five years of age and younger should use a classroom bathroom if one is available. If a classroom bathroom is not available, workers should escort a group of children to the hallway bathroom. They should always go in a group, never taking a child to the bathroom alone. The workers should check the bathroom first to make sure that it is empty, and then allow the children inside. The workers should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children back to the classroom. If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, the worker should open the bathroom door and call the child's name. If a child requires assistance, the workers should prop open the bathroom door, and leave the stall door open as they assist the child.

For the protection of all, workers should *never* be alone with a child or youth in a bathroom with the door closed and never be in a closed bathroom stall with a child or youth. Parents are strongly encouraged to have their children visit the bathroom prior to each class or activity.

Accidental Injuries to Children or Youth

In the event that a child or youth is injured while under our care, the following steps should be followed:

1. For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, workers will provide First Aid (Band-Aids, etc.) as appropriate and will notify the youth's parent or guardian of the injury at the time the youth is picked up from our care.
2. For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple First Aid, the parent or guardian will immediately be summoned in addition to the worker's supervisor. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.
3. Once the youth has received appropriate medical attention, an incident report will be completed in the case of injuries requiring treatment by a medical professional.

Training

The WPC will provide training on this youth protection policy to all new childcare workers and will strive to provide opportunities for additional training classes, or events, on an as needed basis. All workers are strongly encouraged to attend these training events.

This policy was adopted by WPC Session on June 27, 2018.