

Child Protection Policy

**North Presbyterian Church
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We live in a society where accidental injury, child abuse and sexual misconduct are a reality. North Presbyterian Church developed preventative measures and policies that will foster a safe, secure environment. Our intent is to observe the following rules to the fullest extent in an attempt to prevent any potential danger and eliminate liability. We pray that the creation of a safe haven for our young people will give them the base they need from which to pursue their journey to know God, love God and serve God.

This policy is reviewed and renewed annually by the Session based upon recommendations from the Administration/Personnel Committee. This policy is specific only to Christian Education and Youth Education programs involving children and youth of North Presbyterian Church. This policy was originally approved by Session on August 7, 2006.

General Rules:

- ❖ No adult who has been convicted of child abuse (either sexual, physical or emotional abuse) should volunteer to work with children or youth in any church-sponsored activity. A child or youth is considered to be anyone under the age of 18 years.
- ❖ Adult survivors of child abuse need the love and support of our congregation. Any adult survivor who desires to volunteer in some capacity to work with children and youth is encouraged to discuss his/her willingness with our minister before volunteering.
- ❖ Permission slips and medical release forms signed by parents/guardians will be used for all fourth through twelfth grade youth programs.
- ❖ Six Month Rule: Anyone volunteering to work with children and youth should have consistent attendance in church for at least six months.

General Rules (continued):

- ❖ Two-Deep Leadership: There will be two individuals present in any classroom, vehicle or situation where there are children or youth present. One of these individuals must be a person over the age of 21 years. Youth between the ages of 14 and 21 years may volunteer in classrooms when a second person, over the age of 21 years, is present. In an instance where there is only one adult in a vehicle, there must also be more than one child or youth. Parental permission must be given in a situation when the aforementioned is not possible.

- ❖ Five Years Older Rule: Any volunteer working with children and youth must be at least five years older than the oldest child or youth they are supervising.

- ❖ New Volunteers: Each new volunteer will fill out a background check release form and participation statement. Upon receipt of the returned forms, the background check will be completed by the designated member of the Administration/Personnel Committee. The volunteer's reference form and application will be discussed. There will be a discussion for all parties to understand both the expectations of the volunteer and the Christian Education and/or Youth Education staff in relationship to the program area.

Background Checks for Employees:

- ❖ Background checks will be performed for all new church employees who have any contact with children and youth, starting September 1, 2006. This includes the Pastor, Associate Pastor, Director of Christian Education, Director of Music for Children & Youth, Youth Director, and any contracted childcare workers. A member of the Administration/Personnel Committee

will be responsible for the paperwork involved in the screening process. Paperwork will remain confidential to the extent possible.

- ❖ All existing church employees who have any contact with children and youth will undergo background checks every two years from the cycle beginning September 1, 2006.
- ❖ This background check includes a national criminal file search that searches a third-party database containing names and addresses associated with the subject's Social Security Number (SSN). The tool then searches the criminal records database using the first and last name and date of birth entered by the user, plus any additional names associated with the SSN that was entered by the user. All criminal records associated with any or all alternate names matching the date of birth by the user are returned, along with the report showing the alternate names and address history. The multiple criminal record sources included in this search are the following: Federal Fugitive files, Department of Corrections prison, parole and release files, Administrative Office Of Courts records, State criminal record repositories, records from other state agencies, and Sex Offender Registries. Motor vehicles records are only searched for employees who will have the responsibility of transporting children and youth. Credit information will NOT be accessed or released to North Presbyterian Church. Dates of college attendance or highest degree earned are verified. All reported past employers within the last seven years will be contacted and interviewed. Completed forms will be kept in a secure file in the church office with other personnel files and will be maintained by the designated member of the Administration/Personnel Committee.

Background Checks for Volunteers:

- ❖ Background checks will be performed for all new volunteers, including Sunday school teachers, Confirmation teachers/advisors, Youth Group Leaders, Vacation Bible School chairperson(s), and chaperones/drivers, who will be working with children and youth, starting September 1, 2006.

- ❖ All existing volunteers who have any contact with children and youth will undergo background checks every two years with the cycle beginning September 1, 2006.
- ❖ This background check includes a national criminal file search that searches a third-party database containing names and addresses associated with the subject's Social Security Number (SSN). The tool then searches the criminal records database using the first and last name and date of birth entered by the user, plus any additional names associated with the SSN that was entered by the user. All criminal records associated with any or all alternate names matching the date of birth by the user are returned, along with the report showing the alternate names and address history. The multiple criminal record sources included in this search are the following: Federal Fugitive files, Department of Corrections prison, parole and release files, Administrative Office Of Courts records, State criminal record repositories, records from other state agencies, and Sex Offender Registries. Motor vehicles records are only searched for volunteers who will have the responsibility of transporting children and youth. Credit information will NOT be accessed or released to North Presbyterian Church.

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Information of Concern from Background Check:

- ❖ If any information comes to light that would indicate that it would not be prudent for an individual to be extended an offer of employment or to volunteer to work with children and youth, there will be a confidential conversation with the individual, the Director of Christian Education, the Pastor of Youth, and the Pastor, discussing the Church's reasoning for declining their offer to volunteer or removing them from their position. All parties will sign the paperwork documenting this discussion. The volunteer's/employee's declination will be noted and the paperwork will be kept in a secure file with personnel records.

Child Advocacy Team:

- ❖ The Child Advocacy Team is comprised of the Pastor, the Director of Christian Education, Pastor of Youth and the Clerk of Session.
- ❖ The purpose of the Child Advocacy Team is to uphold the Child Protection Policy to provide a safe, secure and nurturing environment while preventing any potential danger and eliminating liability.
- ❖ If the person of concern is a church staff member, the Chairperson of the Administration and Personnel Committee will also be involved. The Pastor will designate, with input from the Director of Christian Education, Pastor of Youth and the Clerk of Session (volunteers) and also the Chairperson of the Administration and Personnel Committee (church staff), who will be the media contact person, should the need arise. An Attorney, knowledgeable in media, may be consulted.



Mandatory Training Program for Volunteers:

- ❖ All volunteers working with children and youth will attend a mandatory training program that outlines these policies and procedures every year, which will be included in the Director of Christian Education's and Pastor of Youth's yearly volunteer/Sunday school teacher training/Youth Group leader orientation. The training will include how to identify child abuse; review of this child protection policy; guidelines for volunteers regarding acceptable behavior for volunteers and education program participants; information regarding how and when to fill out an accident report; discipline in the classroom and sexual harassment.
- ❖ If a volunteer fails to attend a training program and cannot make other arrangements to be trained, then they will not be considered for a volunteer position working with children and youth.

Reporting Procedures:

- ❖ New York State law does not declare clergy, church staff or volunteers to be mandated reporters (persons legally responsible for reporting known and reasonably suspected case of abuse). This does not relieve the church of the moral obligation and responsibility to report suspected incidences of child abuse. Any church staff or volunteer that has a concern about a child or youth under the age of 18 years, should report their concern to a member of the Child Advocacy Team.
- ❖ If it becomes necessary to report a case of abuse, the police department for the city/town of the suspected abused child or youth, within which he or she resides, will be notified, as will be the Amherst Police Department.

Notice of Concern:

- ❖ A "Notice of Concern" document will be filled out by a member of the Child Advocacy Team and reported to the other members of the Team. The form will be kept in a secure file with the Personnel Records.
- ❖ If the individual of concern is a staff member, church volunteer or church member, the Presbytery of Western New York has a recommended process outlined in detail that will be followed at the time of the complaint.

Implementation

- ❖ This policy will be implemented fairly and in a consistent way exercising good judgment and common sense.

Resources

Hammar, Richard R., Klipowicz, Steven W., Cobble, James F. (1993). Church law and tax report, *Reducing the risk of child sexual abuse in your church*. Christian Ministry Resources, Matthews, NC.

Melton, Joy T. (2000). *Safe Sanctuaries, Reducing the risk of child abuse in the church*, Discipleship Resources, Nashville, TN.

Swagman, Beth. (1997). *Preventing Child Abuse*, CRC Publications, Grand Rapids, MI.

We won't let it happen here!, Preventing child sexual abuse in the church, (2000). Presbyterian Church USA Publication, Louisville, KY.

Child Protection Policy, (2003). Orchard Park Presbyterian Church, Orchard Park, NY.