

**Westminster Presbyterian Church, Santa Fe, NM
Child and Youth Protection Policy**

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Introduction and Purpose

As people who seek to live the commandment to “let the children come” (Matthew 19:14) and who take seriously the many Biblical imperatives to care for those who are vulnerable, the members of Westminster Presbyterian Church, Santa Fe (WPC or Church) take seriously the importance of providing a safe and nurturing environment for all children, youth, and vulnerable adults participating in the activities and programs of WPC.

With the establishment of this Child and Youth Protection Policy (the Policy), Westminster Presbyterian Church is setting an example and taking a stand against abuse, neglect, and exploitation, all of which break the relationships and trust to which our Church is committed.

The Child and Youth Protection Policy is intended to protect the children and youth in our Church community, the adult volunteers and employees who work with them, and the Church itself.

The Policy establishes standards and procedures for:

- Supervision of and interaction with children and youth
- Screening and training volunteers and staff
- Reporting of and responding to suspicious or inappropriate activity

This Policy seeks to be practical and reasonable – relying upon sound judgment and good sense – while at the same time ensuring that necessary safeguards are in place to protect our children and youth.

Scope and Applicability

The Child and Youth Protection Policy applies to all Westminster Presbyterian Church staff and any church member or non-member volunteer involved in ministry, education, functions, situations, or other events with children and youth.

Covered activities and programs – both on and off church premises – include but are not limited to: Sunday School classes, youth fellowship programs, nursery, Vacation Bible School, children and youth choirs, church-sponsored retreats and mission trips, and confirmation mentoring.

For infrequent or unusual Church situations that are not easily classified in the Policy, the standards and spirit of the Policy shall be recognized as being in force.

Definitions

- **Staff:** an employee of Westminster Presbyterian Church.
- **Volunteer:** A “volunteer” is one who offers of his/her own free will and without expectation of compensation to lead or provide childcare for the children and youth who participate in activities sponsored by Westminster. The term “volunteer” includes but is not limited to teachers, drivers, chaperones, childcare providers, youth leaders, and confirmation mentors who work with children and youth, as well as youth who serve as leaders working with children.
- **Child:** Any minor from birth to completion of 5th grade (including the summer following 5th grade)
- **Youth:** Any minor from 6th grade to age 18. Some youth will turn 18 before completing high school; they will be covered by this policy until high school graduation.
- **Rule of Three:** The rule or policy that no adult will ever be alone with a child or youth, and that when a child/youth is present there will, at all times, be at least three people present (including the child/youth), which may include one adult and two children/youth or two adults and one child, as appropriate under the circumstances. Any exceptions to the Rule of Three will be outlined below.
- **Adult:** a person over the age of 18.

Guidelines for Interacting with Children and Youth

Code of Conduct

Westminster Presbyterian Church expects that all staff and volunteers with children and youth will exemplify Christ's love of children in all that they do and will offer a healthy and positive Christian role model. WPC employees and volunteers:

1. Will support and promote spiritual and emotional growth and development in their interactions with children and youth.
2. Will provide proper supervision and exercise sound judgment, always maintaining a safe environment.
3. Will observe the Rule of Three as documented in the Child-Youth Protection Policy and will avoid one-on-one situations with a child or youth except in emergency or pre-approved situations.
4. Will respect the rights of children and youth not to be touched in ways that make them feel uncomfortable and will discourage children from touching one another in an inappropriate manner.
5. Will be alert to possible signs of abuse to children participating in church programs and immediately report any suspicions to the staff person responsible for the program.
6. Will not verbally, emotionally, physically, or sexually abuse children.
7. Will not discipline children by use of physical punishment or by failing to provide the necessities of care.
8. Will use physical restraint only when necessary to protect the child or others from harm and will report circumstances to the child's parent or guardian or the staff person responsible for the program.
9. Will release children only to adults authorized by the child's parent or guardian.
10. Will not possess or use illegal drugs or alcohol or smoke or use tobacco during church programs for children and youth.
11. Will not supervise children or youth in the event judgment and ability is impaired by legally prescribed medication.
12. Will not engage in profanity, inappropriate language or jokes, or any kind of harassment in the presence of children, youth, or parents.
13. Will not share inappropriate details of their personal life or ask children or youth to share inappropriate details through written, verbal, or electronic communication.
14. Will not date youth program participants.
15. Will give gifts only on a group basis or for specific occasions (e.g., baptism, confirmation, birthday, graduation). Giving gifts to individual children or youth should be done only with the knowledge and permission of parents.

Rule of Three

No adult shall ever be alone with a child or youth, whether in a physical space, on the telephone, or using a social communication tool or media. This rule applies to all activities sponsored by Westminster involving children or youth, whether on-site or off-site. Exceptions are defined below.

At least two adults should supervise all church-sponsored programs and activities involving children and youth whether on or off campus. Adults should make every reasonable effort to remain in sight of one another at all times except in emergency situations and when circumstances demand otherwise.

One adult in any program for children and youth at Westminster Presbyterian must be at least 21 years of age and at least five years older than the oldest program participant. The second adult present in these situations may be 18 years old and a high school graduate. In any one-on-one exceptions outlined in this policy, the adult must be at least 21 years old. With children and youth in Sunday School, two adults should be present whenever possible. However, one adult may teach 6th grade or above as long as there is more than one youth present in the class. If only one youth is present, the class should combine with another group.

Exceptions to the Rule of Three:

- An adult may be alone with a youth or child when they are in a public location, with other persons coming in and out of the area (for example, meeting in a coffee shop or in Koinonia Hall on a Sunday morning)
- An adult volunteer, who has agreed to uphold the same standard of care as paid staff and volunteers, who is acting in the role of parent, friend, or neighbor, and who has received in advance the consent of a parent or guardian, is allowed to transport a child or youth to or from Westminster programs
- A child or youth requests one-to-one pastoral counseling, provided that the parent or guardian should ordinarily be notified as to when and where the counseling sessions will take place, and the counseling takes place in a room or office with an open or cracked door. The door may be closed if a clear glass window is in the door. The adult must be visible from outside the room and at no time may the door be locked.
- An emergency occurs and one-to-one interaction between a child or youth and an adult is necessary, provided (a) care is taken to conduct the interaction with visibility to others, (b) another adult should have knowledge of the situation, and (c) Westminster and the parent or guardian must be notified as soon as possible.

The following are specific guidelines for:

Bathroom Use:

- *Infants and Toddlers*
 - Diaper changing must always take place in line of sight of another adult.
- *4th Grade and Younger*

- If not under the supervision of a parent or guardian, all children through the completion of 4th grade will be accompanied to the bathroom by an adult (preferably the same gender), who will wait outside the door for the child, after first checking the bathroom to make sure it is a safe environment. If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, the adult should knock, open the door, and call the child's name. If a child requires assistance, the adult should prop open the bathroom door and leave the stall door open to assist the child, first encouraging the child to handle as much of the process as she or he can.

Overnight Trips

- On overnight trips with children or youth, reasonable boundaries should be in place to respect the privacy of each person. Males and females should sleep in separate rooms. An adult may sleep in a room with two or more youth of the same sex. An adult should never share a bed with a youth or sleep alone in a room with only one youth.
- Under no circumstances can one adult alone take or accompany children or youth on an overnight outing. In addition, two adults who are married to each other should not be the only adult chaperones on any overnight trip.

Social Media Policy

Communicating with Children and Youth

- **Privacy Settings.** Set stringent privacy settings on any social networking profile if you are an adult ministering to children and youth.
- **Youth Leaders, Teachers and Advisors.** Grant the appropriate staff person full access to your profile and correspondence if you accept friend requests from minors or youth associated with our community of faith. It is recommended that adults allow 'friend' and 'follow' requests to come from youth, not from them to a youth.
- **Abuse and Neglect.** Material on any site (church-affiliated or not) that raises suspicion that a child has been or will be abused/neglected/exploited should be immediately reported to the clergy and/or Department of Social Services (DSS).
- **Two-Adult Policy.** Any and all private communications between a child/youth and adult must include two adults, preferably one being a church staff member.
- **Group Page.** Keep in mind that the best way to communicate is through a group page set up by the church. Tie events to the group page.
- **Limit Commentary on Pictures.** If you are an adult, limit comments to just one or two photographs on a child/youth's page. Otherwise it can be perceived as intrusive and make the child/youth feel uncomfortable.

Groups on Social Networking Sites

- Be sure each group has at least two unrelated adult administrators as well as at least two youth participants.
- **Closed Vs Hidden.** Choose closed, not "hidden" groups, for youth.
- Report any material on any site (whether affiliated with the church or not) that raises suspicion that a child has been or will be abused/neglected/explored to the clergy or the Department of Social Services. If material is on a church- affiliated

site, that material should be documented for church records and then removed from the site after consultation with DSS or the police.

- **Inappropriate Behavior.** Address any content that depicts inappropriate behavior during a church-sponsored event or activity with fellow youth leaders and parents.
- **Open to Parents.** Open social networking groups for youth to current parents.
- **Former Youth Workers.** Remove former adult leaders from administrative functions of social media sites once they depart from their position as youth ministry staff or youth leader.

Screening and Education for Volunteers and Staff

Volunteers and staff will be screened and educated as described below. Results of background checks and self-disclosure statements will be kept strictly confidential.

General Volunteers include individuals volunteering in situations where there will be two or more adults present in the company of children. All general volunteers:

- Will complete an interview with a program staff person or volunteer designated by a staff person. During this interview, the volunteer may be asked to provide background information and references.
- Will complete a Child Protection training and educational seminar arranged by WPC within 3 months of beginning to work with children or youth. Parents of high school-age volunteers should provide written permission for the young person to attend the training as well as written acknowledgement that their child has never been arrested.
- Will acknowledge in writing that they have reviewed, understand, and will comply with the Child and Youth Protection Policy and will verify that they have never been the subject of a formal complaint to governmental authorities such as the police or the Children, Youth and Family Department or convicted of a crime against children or a violent crime. The supervising staff person will use his or her best judgment in determining how disclosed information will affect the person's ability to volunteer.
- Will be checked to ensure that he/she is not listed on the sex offender registry.
- Must be willing to submit to a background check upon request

Overnight and One-on-One Volunteers include individuals volunteering in a position that may include the following situations: any overnight activity with children and any potential one-on-one activities with a child. All overnight and one-on-one volunteers:

- Will have been a member of WPC for at least 6 months before volunteering with children and youth.
- Will complete an interview with a program staff person or volunteer designated by a staff person. During this interview, the volunteer may be asked to provide background information and references.
- Will complete a Child Protection training and educational seminar arranged by WPC within 3 months of beginning to work with children or youth.
- Will acknowledge in writing that they have reviewed, understand, and will comply with the Child and Youth Protection Policy and will verify that they have never been the subject of a formal complaint to governmental authorities such as the police or the Children, Youth and Family Department or convicted of a crime against children or a violent crime.
- Will submit to a national criminal records check and any other background checks that are deemed necessary by the church. Background check information will be reviewed by the direct supervisor and a file maintained in the church office. The supervising staff person will use his or her best judgment in determining how disclosed information will affect the person's ability to volunteer.
- Will provide a copy of a valid form of government issued photo identification.

Staff and Interns: includes all current and prospective employees of the Church. All interns and paid employees of the Church:

- Will complete a written application and provide personal references.
- Will complete an in-person interview during which the potential staff member will be asked to provide background information and references.
- Will complete a Child Protection training and educational event arranged by WPC within 3 months of employment (parents of high school-age volunteers should provide written permission for the young person to attend the training as well as written acknowledgement that their child has never been arrested).
- Will acknowledge in writing that they have reviewed, understand, and will comply with the Child and Youth Protection Policy and will verify that they have never been the subject of a formal complaint to governmental authorities such as the police or the Children, Youth and Family Department or convicted of a crime against children or a violent crime.
- Will submit to a national criminal records check and any other background checks that are deemed necessary by the church. Background check information will be reviewed by the direct supervisor and a file maintained in the church office. The supervising staff person will use his or her best judgment in determining how results of background checks will affect the applicant's employment.
- Will provide a copy of a valid form of government issued photo identification.

Reporting and Responding

Allegations

Every employee and volunteer of Westminster Presbyterian Church shall report any situation that presents a suspicion that child abuse may have occurred. Such report shall be made within 24 hours to the Pastor. If the allegation is against the Pastor, a report shall be made to the Clerk of Session. Either the Clerk or the Pastor will make sure that policy is followed as outlined in this document.

Mandated Reporting

Every person who knows or has reasonable suspicion that a child is being abused or neglected in New Mexico must report the matter immediately to CYFD's Statewide Central Intake child abuse hotline (1-855-333-SAFE [7233] or #SAFE from a cell phone), or to law enforcement or the appropriate tribal identity. Specific professionals mentioned under the law as mandated reporters are: licensed physicians, residents or interns, law enforcement officers, judges presiding during a proceeding, nurses, schoolteachers, school officials, social workers, and members of the clergy who have information not privileged as a matter of law.

G-4.0301 Trust and Confidentiality

In the exercise of pastoral care, ministers of the Word and Sacrament and ruling elders who have been commissioned by a presbytery to limited pastoral service (G-2.10), shall maintain a relationship of trust and confidentiality, and shall hold in confidence all information revealed to them in the course of providing care and all information relating to the exercise of such care.

When the person whose confidences are at issue gives express consent to reveal confidential information, then a minister of the Word and Sacrament or a commissioned pastor (also known as commissioned ruling elders) ruling elder commissioned to pastoral service may, but cannot be compelled to, reveal confidential information.

A minister of the Word and Sacrament or a commissioned pastor (also known as commissioned ruling elder) may reveal confidential information when she or he reasonably believes that there is risk of imminent bodily harm to any person.

G-4.0302 Mandatory Reporting

Any member of this church engaged in ordered ministry* and any certified Christian educator employed by this church or its congregations, shall report to ecclesiastical and civil legal authorities knowledge of harm, or the risk of harm, related to the physical abuse, neglect, and/or sexual molestation or abuse of a minor or an adult who lacks mental capacity when (1) such information is gained outside of a confidential communication as defined in G-4.0301, (2) she or he is not bound by an obligation of privileged communication under law, or (3) she or he reasonably believes that there is risk of future physical harm or abuse.

*Ordered ministries include Ministers of Word and Sacrament, Ruling Elders, and Deacons

In the event of an allegation of child abuse, the following procedures shall be followed at Westminster Presbyterian Church:

- Every allegation of abuse shall be taken seriously. Adequate care, respect, and confidentiality shall be offered to alleged victims and perpetrators until the allegation is substantiated or cleared.
- The Pastor shall report allegations of child abuse to the police department that has jurisdiction and to NM CYFD as required or necessary. If the allegation involves a report of abuse by a church employee or volunteer or on church property, the Pastor should make a report to the church's liability insurance provider and may wish to consult with an attorney.
- If a report is made, parents will be notified unless parents are the alleged abuser or it would pose a risk to the child to inform the parent. Staff members will use their best judgment in revealing the identity of the alleged abuser to parents.
- Written documentation relating to the matter shall be kept in a confidential file.
- The protection of the child is of primary importance. The Pastor will use his or her best judgment in terminating or suspending accused staff members and in the separating of alleged victim and alleged abuser.
- All church employees and volunteers will refer any inquiries regarding the situation to the Pastor. The Pastor, or his/her designee, shall be the only person authorized to release any information regarding an allegation except where the law requires others to release information, such as to a protective services investigator or a police officer.

Concerns

From time to time, concerns arise regarding the conduct of our children, youth, and adults at WPC that are not clearly abuse related issues but impinge upon child and youth protection and safety and may require attention and review. Sometimes patterns and trends of a questionable nature may be noticed.

Examples of such concerns might include inappropriate behavior by leaders or participants, unsafe swimming conduct, inappropriate language, dress or leadership, or failure to follow church policy.

All adults, youth and children are encouraged to report any issues as soon as possible to the responsible staff person or Pastor as soon as possible. Such notification may be oral.

All concerns reported shall be documented and addressed to ensure the safety and well-being of the children and youth. A file of documented concerns shall be maintained by the Pastor or his/her designee and shall be reviewed at least annually by the Pastor.

Addressing Members Who Are Known Offenders

Westminster Presbyterian Church seeks to embody the love of Christ to all. In addition to requiring us to ensure the safety and nurture of all children and youth, this love requires us to be a place of redemption and grace. Therefore, if a staff member is made aware that a member or visitor is a convicted offender, the Pastor should be notified. The Pastor, in conversation with Session, should use his or her best judgment in counseling the offender and setting appropriate expectations on that person's life in the community. The Pastor, in conversation with Session, should also use his or her judgment in advising other staff members of the offender's presence in the church.

Westminster Presbyterian Church Child and Youth Protection Policy

Acceptance and Affirmation

I have reviewed, understand, and will comply with the Child and Youth protection Policy of Westminster Presbyterian Church _____ (initial)

I have never been the subject of a formal complaint to governmental authorities such as the police or the Children, Youth, and Families Department (or similar department in another jurisdiction), or been convicted of a crime against children or violent crime
Yes/No _____ (initial) If yes, please describe

I will submit to a criminal background check upon request _____ (initial)

Printed Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____