



Child Protection Policy

Bethany Presbyterian Church

Revision 7-2015



"Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me." Matthew 18:5

MISSION STATEMENT

Children are both the present and the future of our Church. They are full participants in the life of the church and in the Realm of God. Unfortunately, child abuse is a reality in the world and churches have not escaped this reality. Our Christian faith calls us to provide hospitality and protection to the children who have been entrusted to our care. Bethany Presbyterian Church will do all within its power to not only protect our children but to train, encourage, and protect the adults who undertake the sacred responsibility of the Christian upbringing of children entrusted to our care.

PURPOSE OF THIS POLICY

- To provide a safe and nurturing Christian environment for the children entrusted to the Bethany Presbyterian Church congregation and its programs.
- To protect the rights and interests of the adult and teen volunteers and the employees of the church who work with the children in church programs by providing them with specific policies and procedures to follow when working with children.
- To provide training to the adult and teen volunteers and employees of the church on the reality of child abuse, risk factors leading to child abuse, and strategies for preventing child abuse.

WHO IS COVERED BY THIS POLICY

All paid employees of the church who have any interaction with the children entrusted to our care, including members of Bethany pre-school staff.

All volunteers who work with children in any of the church sponsored programs on a continuing or occasional basis.

DEFINITIONS

See Appendix A for definitions associated with this policy.

SCREENING OF EMPLOYEES AND VOLUNTEERS

All employees of Bethany Presbyterian Church; volunteers that work with children under the age of 18; will be required to have the following clearances:

- Report of criminal history from the Pennsylvania State Police (PSP);
- Child Abuse History Clearance from the Department of Human Services (Child Abuse)
- Fingerprint based federal criminal history submitted through the Pennsylvania State Police or its authorized agent (FBI).

Volunteers who are not required to obtain the FBI Clearance because they are applying for an unpaid position and have been a continuous resident of Pennsylvania for the past 10 years must swear or affirm in writing that they are not disqualified from service based upon a conviction of an offense under §6344.

These clearances need to be renewed every 5 years.

Employee and volunteer refresher screening will be determined by the Personal Committee and Discipleship Team respectively. The goal would be at the beginning of the certification period for long term employees/volunteers and yearly for seasonal volunteers. Refresher screening will include:

- Review of the Child Protection Policy.
- Signature of the Covenant of Participation. (Appendix B)
- Verification of required clearances.

All records related to these clearances will be placed in a secure location in the church office and will only be accessed in the event that an incident is reported.

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

- **Two Adult Rule:** Bethany Presbyterian Church will make every effort possible to have two adults in attendance at any program, class, or event for children. Exceptions may be made to this rule when youth (*CPP Covenant approved) are baby-sitting groups of children in the church building during adult classes, Potluck dinners etc., and when a youth (*CPP Covenant approved) is paired with an adult for supervision of pre-school children on Sunday mornings. However, at least 2 baby-sitters and one adult should be present.
 - Exception is made in the case of members of the clergy who may need to meet privately with children as part of their professional duties.
 - Exceptions may also be granted on occasions that will be reviewed by a responsible person on the Discipleship team.
- **Open Door Policy:** All classroom doors will have an unobstructed window or remain open during the activity or class. Discipleship Team Elders and Program Coordinators will make random visits to all classrooms or areas where children are located.
- **Written Parental Permission:** At least one parent or guardian must provide written permission for their child to leave the church grounds for an activity and/or travel in the car of an employee or volunteer of the church. Emergency medical authorization forms shall also be on file. These Parental Permission Forms are to be renewed each calendar year.
 - It is recommended that children 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. This policy is not intended to prohibit staff or adult 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.

- No person under the age of 21, (25 for use of the church vans), may drive other children on church program trips.
- **Guidelines for Overnight Youth Events:** All adult volunteer chaperones for overnight youth events must have current Pa. certificates on file with the church and be approved by the youth director and discipleship team. There must be 1 adult volunteer for every 5 youth of the same gender. 6 or more youths of each gender will require an additional adult volunteer of the same gender. The youth director or program coordinator will not be a part of the volunteer count but can require more adult chaperones based on their need. All additional chaperones and adult volunteers are subject to the above selection restrictions.

**See Appendix A*

PHILOSOPHY OF YOUTH MINISTRY

Bethany recognizes that a fundamental goal of the junior and senior high philosophy of ministry is to build relationships with students and families and to have regular, intentional contact with students. Meetings that spontaneously occur between one employee/volunteer and a group of minors or with a single minor are to be encouraged rather than thwarted by the scope of this policy.

A signed Parental Permission form outlining the goal of this ministry at Bethany and the role that is expected of youth leaders in building relationships with the children will be on file with the youth director. These forms will be renewed each year prior to the startup of Youth Group. All new participants will be required to submit a completed form before participating in any Youth sponsored activity. Youth leaders and Mentors will have current Pa. State mandated background checks before working with the youth.

TRAINING WORKERS

All paid and volunteer staff shall be trained at the beginning of their service and shall have a periodic refresher training session. Proper training will allow workers to honestly and discreetly protect themselves and the children of the church. Training will cover the following topics.

- The church's policies for the prevention of abuse and the protection of employees/volunteers
- Procedures to be used in ministries involving children
- Steps to report a suspicion or incident of abuse

All training will be scheduled by the Discipleship team. Training may involve classroom participation and/or review of the current Protection Policy in effect. The Discipleship team and the Personnel committee will make the decision on training requirements for each group.

PARTICIPATION COVENANT

All paid and volunteer staff working with children will be required to sign a written covenant of participation, agreeing to the principles of this policy. This covenant can be useful not only in establishing behavior standards but also is an important reminder of our high regard for our Christian ministries to children.

This covenant of participation will be renewed during refresher training.

REPORTING PROCEDURES

Line of reporting:

Mandated Reporter

Pa. Act 153 effective December 31, 2014, clarifies and expands the definition of “**mandatory reporter**”. People in the following positions are defined as mandatory reporters:

- Clergy members, including ministers and other spiritual leaders.
- Any individual, paid or unpaid, who, on the basis of that individual’s role as an integral part of a regularly scheduled service, activity or program, accepts responsibility for a child. This includes individuals serving at youth camps or programs, sports or athletic programs, outreach programs, enrichment programs, troops, clubs and similar organizations.

RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE

Mandatory reporters must make an immediate and direct report of suspected child abuse to ChildLine either at www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis or by calling 1-800-932-0313. After making the report to ChildLine, the reporter is required to immediately notify the person in charge (or their designated agent) of the institution, facility, school or agency and the following steps and procedures will be taken:

- If necessary, the child's emotional, physical safety and support is assured.
- The child's parents or guardians are notified.
- The alleged abuser is discreetly removed from further involvement with children during the investigation.

During the investigation a written record is kept of the steps taken by the church in response. Including the following:

- Date and time of the reporting.
- Name, age and address of the victim(s)
- Date, time of the alleged incident
- Name, age and address of the alleged abuser and his/her relationship to the child
- Details that were reported.

Responding to the established allegation: If an allegation is established the following steps shall be taken:

- The church's attorney and liability insurance company are notified as soon as possible.
- Full cooperation is given to law enforcement officials and child welfare agencies.

Mandated Reporter Training Course: www.reportabusepa.pitt.edu

OUR CONTINUING COMMITMENT

Bethany Presbyterian Church reserves the right to review this policy on a periodic basis and make necessary changes to enhance the guidelines for the protection of children in our care.

Appendix A

DEFINITIONS

Recognizing that there are other forms of child abuse, for the purposes of this policy

"**Abuse**" See definition below.

"**Adult**" is a person 18 years of age and older.

"**Child**" is a person 17 years of age and younger.

"**Mandated reporter**" is anyone who is a part of his or her ministry in the church has contact with children.

"**Designated reporter**" is the Senior Pastor who is responsible to document any allegation to the appropriate authority.

"**CPP Covenant Approved Youth**" for the purpose of this policy is a youth, 6th grade or above, that has gone through the Secondary screening.

DEFINITION OF SEXUAL ABUSE WHEN DEALING WITH CHILDREN

According to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania "Sexual Abuse or Exploitation" is

"The employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement or coercion of any *child* to engage in or assist any other person to engage in any sexually explicit conduct or any simulation of any sexually explicit conduct for the purpose of producing any visual depiction, including photographing, videotaping, computer depiction or filming. The following offenses are included; rape, sexual assault, involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, aggravated indecent assault, molestation, incest, indecent exposure, prostitution, statutory sexual assault, or other form of sexual exploitation of children.

" 23 Pa.C.S.A. sections 6303".

REQUIRED PENNSYLVANIA CERTIFICATION

- Pennsylvania State Police criminal History
- Department of Human Services (Child Abuse)
- Federal Criminal History Report, including a set of fingerprints

The FBI fingerprint certificate can be waived for volunteers if you have been a Pennsylvania resident for the past 10 contiguous years.

- **"Abuse"** may be violent or non-violent... All abuse is an exploitation of a child's vulnerability and powerlessness in which the abuser is fully responsible for the actions.
- **"Abuse"** is *criminal behavior* that involves children in sexual behaviors for which they are not personally, socially, and developmentally ready.
- **"Abuse"** includes behaviors that involve touching and non-touching aspects. In no case are teachers or workers permitted to physically or verbally abuse a child. Corporal punishment or verbal abuse is never permitted.

The congregation Bethany Presbyterian Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children and workers who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the church. No adult who has been convicted of child abuse is eligible to work with children or youth in a church-sponsored activity.

As a worker in this church, do you agree to:

- Observe and abide by all church policies regarding working in ministries with children and youth?
- Participate in Child Protection training and education events provided by the church?
- Inform the minister of this congregation if you have ever been convicted of child abuse?

I have read this **COVENANT OF PARTICIPATION**, and I agree to observe and abide by the policies set forth **above**.

Initial	NAME (PLEASE PRINT)	Initial	NAME (PLEASE PRINT)

Signature of Supervisor _____ Date _____

(Sample form) REPORT OF SUSPECTED ABUSE OR SEXUAL MISCONDUCTREPORTED BY

Name and Title _____

Address _____

Telephone _____

PERSON SUSPECTED OF MISCONDUCT

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone _____

Ministry Position _____

OTHER PERSONS INVOLVED (WITNESS OR VICTIMS)

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone _____

Describe the incident of suspected misconduct. Including date(s), time(s), and location(s):
(use additional paper as necessary)

Signature of reporter _____ Date _____ Time _____