

# **Emmanuel Presbyterian Church**

## **Child Abuse Prevention Policy**

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# Emmanuel Presbyterian Church

## Child Abuse Prevention Policy Introduction

Emmanuel Presbyterian Church of Arlington, Virginia, ("Emmanuel") is committed to providing a safe, secure environment for every child involved in any program or function conducted by the church. This is essential not only to prevent abuse of our children but also to ensure that everything we do better enables our children to be receptive to the gospel message and the teachings of God's Word. Further, those who work with our children must commit to:

1. Loving them as Christ loves them.
2. Setting an example of proper Christian conduct in the way we live our own lives.
3. Being prepared so the time spent with them is meaningful and impacts them with the gospel in compelling ways.
4. Understanding that we live in a fallen world where someone may try to infiltrate our congregation with intentions to abuse the same children we are loving and teaching. It is with this sad, but real, understanding that this policy is adopted by the Session for implementation throughout the ministries and activities of the church.

This policy may be amended from time to time. Volunteers and paid staff (collectively, "**caregivers**") each agree to keep themselves apprised of the Child Abuse Prevention Policy, and to enforce and abide by it.

## SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES AND ACTIONS

### Screening

1. *Non-routine volunteers in nurseries:* Non-routine volunteers for Sunday morning nursery duty in the Infant and Toddler nurseries need not be interviewed and need not complete an application so long as the number of volunteer workers in each nursery remains at least two people during each service and person who has undergone the application and background check process supervises them. They must, however, meet all membership requirements and sign and abide by the (i) "Child Protection Pledge," and (ii) "Child Abuse Prevention Policy Agreement" at the end of this document prior to working with children at Emmanuel.
2. *Paid caregivers and volunteers for Sunday school:* Each paid caregiver applicant working with children (birth through fifth grade) will be interviewed and must complete a "Family Ministry Paid Caregiver Application." Each volunteer teaching Sunday school on a regular basis must complete a Family Ministry Volunteer Application or have talked to the Director of Children's Ministry and been approved by the Session to volunteer.
  - a. All adult routine volunteers and paid caregiver applicants are required to complete criminal background checks.
  - b. All adult routine volunteers and paid caregiver applicants must read and sign an agreement form to uphold and comply with the "Child Protection Pledge" and "Child Abuse Prevention Policy Agreement" prior to working with children at Emmanuel.
  - c. Any information gained from the application, references, or criminal record check indicating there may be a problem in allowing the applicant to work with children will be referred to the Session for further review and determination of the application's acceptance or rejection. Further, any member of the Emmanuel pastoral/professional staff or any ruling elder having personal knowledge of an applicant may recommend their application be rejected if they believe the applicant is not equipped or suitable to work with children. The

Session has the ultimate authority, in its sole discretion, and for any reason, to accept or reject an application.

- d. If such a recommendation is received, or it is determined that any applicant may present a danger to our children, the Emmanuel staff member making that determination, in conjunction with the Session, will arrange for a meeting with the applicant to discuss the situation. A decision to accept or reject the application should be made at that meeting; unless it is determined additional information should be obtained. An applicant may appeal a rejection to the full Session.

3. *Minors*: Minors, age 13-17, are permitted to serve as additional aids. They will be screened on an individual basis, and deemed competent by the Director of Children's Ministry.

4. No one will be allowed to engage in any children work prior to the satisfactory completion of the applicable screening procedures.

### **Preventive Measures**

1. *Member/Six-Month Attendee Policy*: All volunteers who work with children or youth must have regularly attended Emmanuel for at least six months or be a member of the church, with the following exceptions:

- a. Those involved in administrative or support tasks in the children ministry departments, where there is no substantial contact with children or youth.
- b. Those who have not been attending Emmanuel for at least six months but intend to make Emmanuel their church home and are members in good standing of an evangelical church. In this case, they must be personally recommended by one of the ordained pastors of the church in which they are members. This recommendation will be obtained and reviewed by the Director of Children's Ministry.
- c. Paid staff whose application to work with children has been accepted by the Director of Children's Ministry.
- d. Minors who are children of members and have been approved by the Director of Children's Ministry.

2. *Two-Caregiver Policy*: At least two caregivers will be present during all Emmanuel activities, including nursery and children's Sunday School, with the following exceptions:

- a. One adult caregiver may supervise children in activities conducted where others can readily observe, for example, in rooms in the same hallway where there are either windows in the doors or the doors are left open. There must be line of sight into the rooms from the hallway.
- b. One caregiver may take children who do not need assistance to the restroom, but will remain outside in the hallway while the children are in the restroom. Children who do not need assistance in the restroom must be accompanied by a child in the same class of the same sex.
- c. One female adult caregiver may take a child needing assistance into the bathroom.

3. *Monitoring of Activities*:

- a. All activities will be conducted in areas open to observation at all times.
- b. One-to-one contacts away from the church property will be conducted in public places and always with the consent of the child's parent or legal guardian. Exceptions to this rule include times when the parents or legal guardians ask the caregiver to baby-sit, etc., so that they are alone with the child. Monitoring of such activities is not the responsibility of the church.

#### **4. Standards for Relationships:**

- a.** Teachers and leaders will normally seek to establish personal relationships with those whom they teach and lead. Physical contact is one part of normal communication in such relationships. Thus, for instance, a brief hug or the gentle placing of a hand on one's arm or shoulder is normally acceptable. Except for necessary or inadvertent touching in connection with the diapering of infants, touching in intimate areas is never acceptable. The care of infants obviously requires diapering, which means touching in private areas. This is acceptable so long as it is done with the intention to clean and not to abuse. In addition, to avoid even the appearance of impropriety, male nursery workers may not change diapers. Only female nursery caregivers who have undergone a background check and complied with the Screening procedures above are allowed to change diapers. Because of this, there must be at least one female caregiver who has undergone a background check and complied with the Screening procedures in the nurseries at all times.
- b.** It is recognized that holding/carrying is basic to the care of small children. Also, small children must sometimes be physically restrained from hurting themselves or others. However, when more than brief physical restraint is needed, a parent or guardian should be brought into the situation.
- c.** Children of any age shall not be spanked or struck in any way by a caregiver. Nor shall caregivers scream or yell at any time.

#### **5. Access to Facilities:**

- a.** To maintain the safety of our children, the only people permitted in the nursery are the children to be cared for, their parents, nursery caregivers, and supervisors.
  - 1.** If the parent or guardian of a child is a registered sex offender, they must coordinate times with the Director of Children's Ministry to drop-off and pick-up their child. The Director of Children's Ministry or Children's Ministry Assistant will be present during these times.
- b.** The nursery opens 15 minutes prior to services, and parents are encouraged to pick up their children immediately after the conclusion of the service. In the event that a child is not picked up within 15 minutes of the end of the session, caregivers will ask the Director of Children's Ministry to locate the parents.
- c.** Nursery workers and Sunday school teachers should ensure that each child is signed in by his/her parent/guardian or other person authorized by the parent on the nursery sign in/out sheet provided.
- d.** In cases that a member or regular attender of the church is a registered sex offender:
  - 1.** Emmanuel will appoint certain point-persons for interacting with such individuals on a weekly basis.
  - 2.** An agreement/covenant containing terms and conditions for the member/attender's behavior (e.g., not permitted in certain areas of the church during services, permitted in certain areas only in the company of an appointed point person) will be drafted, reviewed, and signed.

#### **6. Identification System:**

- a.** In order to protect the children in our care, each child must be signed into his/her class by a parent, guardian, or Emmanuel representative (e.g., Director of Children's Ministry or

Children's Ministry Assistant ). Upon signing in the child, the parent/guardian will receive stickers with the name of the child. The sticker that is color-coded with the child's classroom must remain on the child. The uncolored sticker remains with the parents. For children in the nursery, a second uncolored sticker may be placed on the child's bag.

**b.** At the end of the service when the parent/guardian comes to pick up the child:

- 1.** The parent/guardian will sign out the child.
- 2.** The caregiver will bring the child to the door and remove the child's colored name sticker. If the child or parent/guardian is unknown to the volunteer, the volunteer will check that the child's colored name sticker corresponds to the parent/guardian's uncolored name sticker.

**c.** Ordinarily, only the parent/guardian who signed the child into the class and has the corresponding name sticker will be permitted to retrieve the child. There are three exceptions to this rule:

- 1.** In the event of an emergency that would result in neither parent/guardian being available to sign out the child at the end of a service, the child will be released to the care of the Director of Children's Ministry or Children's Ministry Assistant.
- 2.** A parent may make prior arrangements with the Director of Children's Ministry or Children's Ministry Assistant to allow for someone other than him/herself or his/her spouse to pick up the child at the end of the service. In this case, the designated person should accompany the parent/guardian to sign in the child, and receive the child's name sticker.
- 3.** Members of Emmanuel who sign in their children will have the option to initial a column on the sign-in sheet that will grant permission to their spouse (and only their spouse) to pick up their child in the event that the parent/guardian who signs in the child is unable to sign-out the child.

### **Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse**

**1. *Reporting Possible Cases of Child Abuse to Emmanuel:*** caregivers are required to report immediately to the Director of Children's Ministry or her designee:

- a.** Any observed or suspected abuse of children.
- b.** Any rumors heard from others, including children, that another child may have been abused.
- c.** Any incident occurring with children under their care where it is possible that a child may have felt they were abused by a caregiver, for whatever reason (i.e., accidental improper touching, injuries resulting from intentional or reckless conduct in the course of games or other group activities).
- d.** A verbal report will be followed within 24 hours by a written report by such caregiver providing the verbal report detailing dates, times, events, and all specifics relating to the incident in chronological order.

**2. *Reporting to the State:*** Volunteers are encouraged to discuss the matter with the Director of Children's Ministry, a member of the Emmanuel Pastoral Staff, or with the elders. This policy does not preclude in any way any staff member, hired helper, caregiver, or volunteer worker from reporting any actual or suspected child abuse observed by them to state authorities. In addition, staff members may be required by law to report incidents to the Virginia Department of Social Services. If a report is made, it may be done so

anonymously and is subject to legal immunity (i.e., the one making the report, whether founded or not, may not be sued for doing so).

3. If the Director of Children's Ministry, Pastors, any ruling Elder, or other paid staff has received a report of actual or suspected child abuse, he or she must take immediate action to report it to their staff supervisor or to the Session. The staff supervisor or Session will immediately initiate an investigation of the report, decide what actually happened or was observed, and make a decision on how it should be handled. Best efforts will be made to conclude the investigation and arrive at a decision within 24 hours, or as soon as possible.
4. Anyone receiving a report that a caregiver may have abused a child under his or her care at an Emmanuel activity must immediately report such to the Director of Children's Ministry, Pastor, or any ruling Elder. The Director of Children's Ministry will initiate immediate action to contact the parents/guardians of that child to let them know what has happened.
5. The Director of Children's Ministry will maintain detailed written records of all reports of actual or suspected child abuse (whether self-reported or reported by the victim or a third party). Such records will be maintained indefinitely. Such records will remain confidential and will not be disclosed except to persons on a need-to-know-basis (e.g., church supervisors, a child's parent or guardian) or to a state authority, as determined by the Session.

### **Education**

This written policy (including any amendments) and responsibilities for reporting abuse will be communicated to all Emmanuel staff, hired caregivers, and routine and non-routine volunteers at the beginning of their service and at least once per year thereafter. Caregivers, parents and guardians will also receive information regarding recognizing signs for detecting possible abuse, prepared by the Virginia Department of Social Services. Other assistance and materials may be obtained from such organizations such as Child Help and National Law Center for Children and Families.

### **Implementation and Supervision of This Policy**

1. The Director of Children's Ministry is responsible for the implementation and ongoing application of this policy in its respective areas, with appropriate administrative assistance.
2. The Director of Children's Ministry will file reports with the Session once a year. These reports will provide the names of those who have received training under this policy, suggested revisions to the policy, and a description of all incidents and actions taken relating to this policy. The elders will also be made aware of any concerns that have arisen in applying the policy.