

# **Emmanuel Presbyterian Church Youth Abuse Prevention Policy**

Emmanuel Presbyterian Church of Arlington, Virginia, (Emmanuel) is committed to providing a safe, secure environment for every youth involved in any program or function conducted by the church. This is essential not only to prevent abuse of our youth, but also to ensure that everything we do better enables our youth to be receptive to the gospel message and the teachings of God's Word. Further, those who work with our youth 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 youth. It is with this 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 agree to keep themselves apprised of the Youth Abuse Prevention Policy, then to enforce and abide by it.

This policy is intended to protect and serve Emmanuel's minors between the ages of approximately 11 to 17 years old. Please refer to Emmanuel's Child Abuse Prevention Policy for Emmanuel's policies regarding the protection of minors younger than 11 years old.

## **YOUTH SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES AND ACTIONS**

### **Screening**

1. Volunteers, including mentors, must meet all requirements, sign the "Youth Abuse Prevention Policy Agreement, Certification, and Authorization and Release" form, and abide by regulations under the "Preventive Measures" section.
2. Each Volunteer must have a background check. Any record check indicating there may be a problem in allowing the Volunteer to work with youth will be referred to the Session for further review and determination of the Volunteer's acceptance or rejection. Further, any member of the Emmanuel pastoral/professional staff or any ruling elder having personal knowledge of a Volunteer may recommend they be rejected if they believe the Volunteer is not equipped or suitable to work with youth. The Session has the ultimate authority, in its sole discretion, and for any reason, to accept or reject a Volunteer.
  - a. If such a recommendation is received, or it is determined that any Volunteer may present a danger to our youth, the Emmanuel staff member making that determination, in conjunction with the Session, will arrange for a meeting with the Volunteer to discuss the situation. A decision to accept or reject should be made at that meeting; unless it is determined that additional information should be obtained. An applicant may appeal a rejection to the full Session.

- b. No one will be allowed to engage in any youth work prior to the satisfactory completion of these screening procedures.

### **Preventive Measures**

These measures will be enforced primarily to preclude the possibility of youth abuse in the ministry settings at Emmanuel. Secondly, their intent is to avoid situations that could lead to allegations of abuse and to assist the church in responding to any such allegations.

1. Member/Six-Month Policy: All volunteers who work with 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 youth ministry departments, where there is no substantial contact with 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 that church. This recommendation will be obtained by the Emmanuel staff member responsible for checking the references for this person.
2. Standards for Relationships:
  - a. Youth mentor volunteers will seek to establish personal relationships with youth. Physical contact is one part of normal communication in such relationships. However, to remain above reproach physical contact will be limited to: hand shakes, high fives, fist bumps, side hugs, etc.
  - b. One-to-one meetings away from the church property will always be conducted in public places with the consent of the child's parent or legal guardian unless prior written permission from the child's parent or legal guardian is provided to the youth mentor specifying an exception.
  - c. Standards for relationships within the Youth Mentor program may be found under Youth Mentor Standards document, attached hereto as Appendix A. Any youth mentor who does not comply with these standards or this policy may be dismissed from his or her mentorship role, at the Youth Pastor's discretion.

### **Education**

1. Volunteers: This written policy (including any amendments), signs for detecting possible abuse, and responsibilities for reporting abuse will be communicated to all individuals at the beginning of their service and at least once per year thereafter during mentor training sessions. In addition, information regarding detecting possible child abuse and responsibilities for reporting abuse will be included in information packets upon request. The Youth Pastor will check in with mentor volunteers periodically to answer any questions and address any concerns.
2. Parents/Guardians: Emmanuel will provide parents with printed materials to assist them in teaching their youth to recognize potential abuse, and how to avoid or prevent it.
3. Assistance and materials from such organizations as Child Help and National Law Center for Children and Family will be obtained as necessary.

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

1. Reporting Possible Cases of Child Abuse: Volunteers are required to report immediately to the Parent/Guardian, Youth Pastor, or Elder:
  - a. Any observed or suspected abuse of youth.
  - b. Any rumors heard from others, to include children and youth, that another may have been abused.
  - c. Any incident occurring with youth under their care where it is possible that a youth may have felt they were abused by a volunteer, 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 detailing dates, times, events, and all specifics relating to the incident in chronological order.
2. State Reporting: This policy does not preclude in any way any staff member 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. However, volunteers are urged to follow Biblical principles from Matthew 18, prior to state notification: first to discuss the matter with a member of the Emmanuel Pastoral, Ministry Staff, or with the elders; and second, to give opportunity for the matter to be investigated and confronted with the offending party.
3. The Youth Pastor, any ruling Elder, other paid staff, having received a report of actual or suspected child or youth abuse must take immediate action to report it to their staff supervisor or to the Session. The Pastor 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. This should take no longer than 24 hours. Any decision to notify state authorities will be made by the Session.
4. Anyone receiving a report from someone working with youth that they may have done something to a youth that may be construed by that youth to be abuse must immediately report such to the Youth Pastor, or any ruling Elder. They will initiate immediate action to contact the parents/guardians of that child or youth to let them know what has happened and why. They will also immediately notify the Session of any such incident.
5. The Youth Pastor will indefinitely maintain detailed written records of all reports of actual or suspected youth abuse (whether self-reported or reported by the victim or a third party).

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

1. The Youth Pastor will be responsible for the implementation and ongoing application of this policy in their respective areas, with appropriate administrative assistance.
2. Reports will be maintained by the Youth Pastor and filed in the church office, available for the Session's review . 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.

My signature below signifies that I have read Emmanuel's Youth Abuse Prevention Policy in its entirety and agree to comply with the standards set forth in this document:

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Printed Name

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Signature

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Date

## **Appendix A**

### **Emmanuel Youth Mentor Standards**

Thank you for being willing to impact the lives of Emmanuel youth! As an Emmanuel Youth Mentor, you serve an extremely important and influential role in the life of Emmanuel Youth. In your time as a mentor, you will experience conversations and moments that will both challenge and bless you. Regardless of the challenge or blessing, it is of utmost importance that you serve out of an “overflow.”

As you “fill the cup” of the youth, you should also be filled as well. Prayer, Scripture reading, Fellowship, and Corporate Worship should be just some of the means of grace you experience from the Father.

“Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

~ Philippians 2:3-8

#### **As a mentor you should:**

- Spend time with your youth no less than once per month
  - Meet in public places
  - Avoid private settings (i.e. apartment/home, vehicle) when meeting with youth
    - Unless consent from parent/guardian is given
- Attend one youth meeting per semester
- Communicate with parents in documentable form (i.e. email, text message)
- Refrain from the use of alcohol, tobacco products, e-cigarettes, or drugs when meeting with youth
- Refrain from sexual or inappropriate jokes or conversations
  - Do not “over share” from your own personal relationships
- Notify parents if youth needs money (i.e. food, movie, etc.)
  - Unless you are willing to pay
- Share any photographs or videos taken involving the youth with the youth’s parents
- Use discretion as to whether you should “friend” youth on social media, as comments and “likes” can be misconstrued
- Cultivate a relationship of trust
  - Never promise to keep secrets
  - Report to Youth Pastor and parents if youth expresses desire to harm themselves or others
- Report to Youth Pastor and/or an Elder if there is any suspected abuse