

Child / Youth Safety Policy

Recommended format

Use in conjunction with handout of resources



A
mandatory
Session
policy

Church Leadership
Development Day
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Presbytery of Genesee Valley
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Title page

1. Purpose of the policy (*the outcomes*)
2. Principles guiding the policy (*the whys*)
3. Scope (*to whom & to which activities and situations this applies*)
4. Terms & definitions
5. Prevention & risk management procedures
6. Intervention procedures
7. Post-incident review
8. Attachments

Simple, clear, direct, basic

- Title of policy
- Specifies that it is a policy of the Session
- Name of church, address, and phone
- Contents
- Date originally adopted; date revisions were adopted.

1. Purpose

What is intended to occur as a result of the policy and the procedures being implemented. (Think in terms of what the **intended outcomes** will be.)

(Creates the touchstones against which decisions can be made. “Will this choice, or this action, further our ability to achieve our **intended outcomes?**”)

1. To fulfill our promises in the sacrament of baptism, that we will nurture those whom we welcome. Protecting children and youth creates a safe environment in which they can be nurtured as disciples of Jesus Christ. [Or cite N.T. scripture in which Jesus welcomes children, indicating God's favor towards them. i.e., a theological affirmation of children and youth.]
2. To prevent harm or injury to children and youth in our care, and to guide our responses when incidents occur.
3. To exercise our fiduciary responsibility as stewards of this church and congregation as a not-for-profit corporation under NYS law. We have a duty to protect the corporation, and by adopting and implementing a child and youth safety policy, we practice wise and prudent risk management.
4. To comply with *Book of Order*, G-3.01016. [This is a mandate for every council in the PC(U.S.A.)] & the spirit of G-4.0302.

The big whys for your congregation

E.g., cite relevant parts of the church's mission and ministry statement.

E.g., another way to extend hospitality to all of God's people, especially those who are vulnerable.

E.g., preserving a safe community of faith and its bonds of trust.

(Creates another touchstone upon which decisions can be made when situations are more grey than black/white.)

3. Scope

States to whom this policy applies

- Children and youth in the congregation.
- Children and youth in the community who participate in the church's mission and ministry, e.g., VBS, Sunday School, youth group...
- Staff (paid and volunteer), members, congregants, and any people of majority age who supervise, teach, or care for children and youth in the church's mission and ministry programs.

3. Scope

States the activities and circumstances to which this policy applies

- Activity, event, program (e.g., Sunday School, youth group, Vacation Bible School. Retreat, mission trip, overnight...)
- Place: on the church campus, off the church campus (e.g., mission trip).
- Sponsored by the church; co-sponsored with another party.

4. Terms & definitions

Glossary

- E.g., differentiates between an accidental injury and injury due to maltreatment (child abuse – physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse – and neglect).
- E.g., differentiates between a member of the church and a congregant, who is not a member but participates.
- E.g., terms like “child,” “youth,” or “minor.”
- E.g., definition of a minor in NYS law is a person younger than 18 y.o. (Dom. Rel. §2). However, age of consent to sexual activity is 17 y.o. (Penal Law §130).

5. Prevention / risk mgmnt.

Procedures: Concrete, practical, specific

- E.g., who is responsible for ensuring this policy is implemented (Christian Education Committee, Sunday School teachers...).
- E.g., who is required to complete a background check, and what kind of background check will be conducted.
- E.g., addresses the range of activities, programs, and events for children and youth.
- E.g., addresses sites where activities occur – both on-site and off-site.
- E.g., addresses health-related issues (medications, allergies...).
- E.g., training people who serve children and youth.

5. Prevention / risk mgmnt.

Prevention procedure: Background checks

- Why do? (Dispositional vs. Situational crime prevention)
 - ❖ People of known disposition: e.g., sexual offender registry.
 1. Unmonitored, unsupervised access, i.e., alone with a minor.
 2. Grooming opportunities, i.e., access to create a dependency of the minor on the adult, reinforced through reward and/or threat. (Institutional grooming)
- What source will you use for the search?
 1. Set your standard & target based on Situational approach.
 2. Invest wisely; higher fee for service is cheaper than a lawsuit.

Procedures: Concrete, practical, specific

- E.g., when X occurs, who does what, when is it done, and how is it done.
- E.g., notification of parents, notification of church leaders, notification of church insurance carrier, notification of civil authorities (NYS Child Abuse Hotline, law enforcement).
- E.g., in situations involving abuse or maltreatment, automatic temporary suspension of a person from access to minors until resolution is achieved.

6. Intervention: Actions

Clear, behavioral descriptions

- When & who to inform on-site caregivers & leaders with authority to act.
- When & who to obtain medical care, in cases of injury.
- When & who to disclose a **reasonable concern** about possible abuse/maltreatment to NY State Child Abuse Hotline. (rationale: cite *Book of Order*, **G-4.0302**)
- When & who to notify parents/guardians.
- When & who to notify church leaders.
- When & who to notify church's insurance carrier.

Low threshold rather than High

Discovery of an incident which requires taking action

- A concern is communicated among caregivers.
“Joan Calvin looks sleepy. Did she take her insulin?”
- Information is disclosed.
“I just checked Joan’s medical information form. She was supposed to take her insulin 40 minutes ago.”
- Safety and well-being guide actions.
“Joan Calvin is way overdue for her 3:00 insulin shot. It’s time to get help. Check her emergency contact sheet.”

What is the threshold for contacting your fire department?



A “reasonable concern” does not require certainty.

Immunity in NYS for Voluntary, Non-Mandated Reporters

“If you make a report in **good faith**, you are immune from civil or criminal liability.”

Source accessed 01/29/17: *Recognizing & Reporting Child Abuse & Neglect: Questions often asked by friends, neighbors and relatives.*

http://www.preventchildabuseny.org/files/1013/0392/1654/reporting_CAN.pdf

7. Post-incident review

Procedures: Concrete, practical, specific

- E.g., When the incident is over, relevant people are gathered: participants, event leaders, witnesses, parents/guardians, church leaders, invited guests with particular expertise...
- E.g., How the injury or harm occurred is described and analyzed descriptively (non-judgmentally).
- E.g., Factors regarding how to prevent the injury from occurring in the future are identified.
- E.g., Responsibility for making necessary changes is assigned, and target dates or action are established.

8. Attachments

Forms, Information

- E.g., volunteer application, including volunteer or staff's consent for conducting a background check.
- E.g., parent's consent for dispensing medication, treating in case of an injury or accident, transporting by vehicle...
- E.g., parent/guardian confirms receipt of the policy and signs willingness to comply.
- E.g., signs and symptoms of child maltreatment (physical, sexual, & emotional abuse, and neglect), who to contact when there is a **reasonable concern** that a minor may have been harmed...

It's easier to change a form than change the policy. (See PGV...)