

**North Park Church
Children's Ministry
Policy & Procedure Manual**

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I. Introduction

Resolution

The lives of children and youth are very precious. We desire to encourage, inspire, and develop our children and youth in the ways of God through Jesus Christ and, as such, we will take great care to eliminate anything that will hinder in this development. This includes providing an environment that is safe and provides protection from emotional, physical, and sexual abuse.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to spell-out the parameters and procedures for providing reasonable care to children involved in all North Park Church programs and activities.

This policy will address three main areas for both paid and volunteer children workers:

- Children's Ministry Policies
- Workers' Procedures and Responsibilities
- Child Abuse Prevention

II. Policies

Injury & First Aid

The church may host a CPR/First Aid training every other year. Volunteers in Children's Ministry will be encouraged, but not required to attend. Paid workers will be required to attend, unless already certified.

If a child is injured while in the care of the children's ministry, the worker should immediately notify the child's parents and the Director of Children's Ministry. The worker will complete an accident report. All injuries must be reported no matter how minor they may seem.

Safety & Security

The safety of our children and the protection of our workers is of the utmost importance. Every worker must undergo the application process as outlined in section III.

The following rules must be adhered to on Sunday mornings. Outside this time, rules are more flexible.

- All workers (paid and volunteer, of legal age) must have up to date clearances.
- Two adults should be present in all nursery rooms. Usually this will be one paid adult and one volunteer adult. These two adults must be unrelated.
- Check in and pick up procedures must always be followed. Parents must return their numbered parent tag to collect their child.

Only members of North Park Church should be in a biblical/spiritual leadership position when working with children.

Restroom & Diapering

Diapering Procedures:

- The church's preferred choice is to have paid nursery staff change diapers.
- All diapers should be checked and changed (if necessary) before pick up.
- Children should be monitored closely while on the changing pad.

Restroom Procedures:

- The hall door to the bathroom should remain open at all times.
- If a child needs assistance in the restroom, those with current clearances are allowed to help, unless one is unavailable.
- Worker and child must wash their hands after using the restroom.

Classrooms & Ratios

Programs

Several Sunday School classes are offered for ages four through 5th grade during the Sunday School hour. Children must be potty trained to attend Sunday School. Nursery is also available during the Sunday School hour for those children not yet potty trained or below the age of four.

During the worship time, nursery is available for infants through 3-year-olds and Children and Worship is available for children age four through 2nd grade. Children attending Children and Worship attend the service with their parents and then are released to participate in Children and Worship around the middle of the adult service.

Nursery Rooms

Ideally, during Sunday School and worship, four different nursery rooms are available:

- The infant room is for children under the age of one and 1-year-olds who are not yet walking.
- The toddler room is for walking 1-year-olds.
- The tyke room is for 2-year-olds and 3-year-olds, who are not yet potty trained.
- Room 206 is for various uses. On Sunday mornings, the three-year-olds are in here all morning. The four-year-olds join them for Sunday School and then the kindergarteners get added for Kids' Worship. This is mostly used for preschool-age 3 and 4-year-olds who are potty trained, during the church service and other children during various church events.

For 2021, our rooms are currently being used for the following:

- The infant room is for children from birth to 18 months.
- The toddler room is closed.
- The tykes room is for 18 – 36 month-olds.

Children's Rooms

- 206 is used for 3 & 4-year-old Sunday School, 3's, 4's and K's Kids' Worship and various babysitting needs.
- 205 and 207 are mainly used on Sunday mornings for Kids' Worship.
- 208 and 210 are used for kindergarten and first grade Sunday School.
- 301 is used for fourth and fifth grades Sunday School.
- 302 is used for second and third grades Sunday School.

At times when not needed, one or more of the rooms may be closed.

Child Care Ratios

In an effort to provide the best possible care for our North Park Church children, we closely monitor the adult-child ratio in each of our nursery, Sunday School and children and worship rooms. Here are the ideal ratios we attempt to follow at North Park Church:

| <i>Class</i> | <i>Ratio</i> |
|--|--------------|
| Infant Nursery | 2:8 |
| Toddler Nursery | 2:10 |
| Tyke Nursery | 2:12 |
| Preschool Nursery | 2:12 |
| 3-4-year-old Sunday School Class | 2:15 |
| 5-6-year-old Sunday School Class | 1:10 |
| 1 st -2 nd grade Sunday School Class | 1:12 |
| 3 rd -5 th grade Sunday School Classes | 1:12 |

Communication

The congregation will be generally informed annually of the Child Safety Policy. All children will be informed annually through their various programs of these policies, as is fitting to their age and understanding. This communication will include information on whom they can consult for help, and the introduction of safe people (see section IV).

All parents/guardians will be notified each fall regarding the Child Safety Policy. All membership classes may also direct new members to our Child Safety Policy.

III. Volunteer & Paid Workers: Procedures & Responsibilities

Application Process

Any volunteer (age eighteen or above) who will be working directly with children at North Park Church will:

- If a new volunteer:
 - Have been actively engaged in the life of the church for at least six months
 - Submit child abuse clearance and criminal record check
 - If volunteer has not lived in Pennsylvania for the last ten years, the FBI criminal record check will also be required.
 - Take part in orientation/training on child abuse issues and agree to adhere to the Standards of Conduct
 - In most cases, volunteers will also be asked to:
 - Interview with the Director of Children's Ministry
 - Register each year using the online volunteer registration form
- If a current volunteer:
 - Maintain up to date clearances for working with children
 - Re-register each year using the online volunteer registration form
 - Attend a volunteer instructional meeting annually

When hiring new paid workers, individuals may need to submit the following:

- A resume' detailing experience and education.
- Three references, two of whom will need to be reached before the individual can be hired.
- Up to date clearances.

Paid workers will also be expected to read and sign the Expectations document before their start date.- We generally hire and add to payroll at age 15. If anyone under the age of 15 works consistently over a period of time, the Director of Children's Ministry may issue a gift card if he/she deems it appropriate for compensation.

All workers (paid and volunteer) will be oriented and required to adhere to the following procedures/guidelines:

- Identifying/releasing children to Parents/Guardian:

Children in the 3rd-5th grade Sunday School classes will be released at the end of class. All other children will only be released to a parent, guardian, sibling or friend identified to one of the workers.

 - During nursery and children and worship check-in, each child will receive a numbered security badge with a matching parent badge, which must be shown when the parent picks up his/her child.
- First-Aid Awareness
- For nursery workers, additional orientation/training and adherence is required for:
 - Special General Nursery Procedures
 - Nursery Cleanliness Procedures
 - Nursery Safety Checklist/Inspection

Standards of Conduct-

A. Prohibited Conduct

To achieve the goal of preventing any forms of abuse or the potential of false allegations of abuse, staff members, volunteer program leaders or any church member providing care for children and youth whether paid or volunteer (“Worker”) shall not engage in any of the following conduct with children or youth program participants (“Child”) whether consensual or non-consensual:

1. abuse of any kind, including sexual abuse
2. sexual exploitation or molestation
3. disseminating, exhibiting, or displaying pornographic material
4. intentional hitting, kicking, slapping or shoving to cause harm
5. selling, giving, or furnishing any youth with any tobacco substance, alcohol, or controlled drug
6. swearing or using obscene, foul, or sexually explicit language
7. demonstrating any romantic or sexual interest in a child
8. removing any dress clothing from another person, except when appropriately required under necessary circumstances (e.g. to evaluate or treat an injury)
9. wearing anything but appropriate attire in the presence of child
10. kissing any child on the lips or in an intimate area
11. prolonging or inappropriately hugging or embracing
12. sleeping in the same bed or bedding with any child
13. remaining in any building, room, motor vehicle or private place with a child except as otherwise permitted in this policy
14. assisting any child in the rest room except as otherwise permitted in this policy
15. denying anyone, who is not a threat to a child, access into a room, vehicle, or other place in which you are present with a child.

B. Permitted Conduct

It is quite natural, appropriate and desirable for Christians to express and share their love and affection for each other and Christ. This sharing is essential for healthy emotional and spiritual wellbeing of individuals, and for the growth and development of a loving and caring Christian community. This sharing of love is especially important to children for their healthy growth and development. The appropriate expressing and sharing of one's Christian love to children shall not be considered abuse or be in any way prohibited, restricted or limited by this policy. The following conduct by a Worker shall be considered to be an expression of this Christian love and not abuse or even creating the appearance of child abuse:

1. verbally expressing one's Christian love and affection to child
2. appropriately holding and comforting child
3. occasionally and appropriately hugging or embracing child, especially when initiated by the child
4. age appropriate sharing of emotional and spiritual concerns with child
5. providing necessary medical care and attention to child
6. encouraging child to appropriately express and share their Christian love.

Guidelines for Private Conversations and/or Counseling

The opportunity for a child to share confidentially his or her private and personal concerns with a Worker can contribute significantly to his or her spiritual, emotional and physical well-being. Indeed, this may be the only time when a child may be willing to disclose any abuse he or she may be suffering. Such private and confidential conversations are an integral part of a caring and loving Christian community.

On the other hand, such private conversations create a very high – risk environment for potential abuse situations to arise. They create an ideal opportunity for: (1) abuse to occur, (2) a false appearance that abuse may be occurring, and (3) a false, but difficult to refute, allegation that an incident of abuse did occur.

Thus, there is a tension between two valuable objectives designed to reach a common ministry goal. A proper balance is difficult to achieve with any set of policies or guidelines, especially given the variety of circumstances and relationships that may exist. However, the following principles shall be used by every Worker as a guide:

1. Location: Private conversations can be conducted more safely in public and populated locations. If possible, all conversations should be conducted in a public place, easily accessible to others.
2. Necessity: If the conversation does not involve confidential matters, but is generally "small talk", it is not necessary to be alone in a private location.
3. Relationship: Be sure you have a good, healthy relationship with the other person. Private conversations and meetings should be avoided if any romantic interests start to develop.
4. Gender issues: Private meetings and conversations with members of the opposite sex are more prone to abuse and the appearance of impropriety.
5. Frequency: Frequent private conversations can create difficulties in a child's healthy development or lead to dangerous relationship dynamics among adults.
6. Ability of the Worker: If a person's spiritual or emotional needs are significant, the worker should refer him or her to the pastor or to a professional counselor. Don't overestimate your own counseling abilities.
7. Reliability: Consider the emotional stability and maturity of the individual. If lacking, private meetings with that person may be dangerous because such individuals may create the highest risk of false accusations.
8. Appearance: Maintain an appropriate appearance at all times. Remember, words and conduct that you may consider to be appropriate at the time can subsequently be made to appear very inappropriate or sinister.
9. Substance of conversation: The substance of the conversation should be appropriate at all times.
10. Touching: Although hugging another person in a public location when several others are present may be appropriate, physical contact in a private, isolated location creates a very high risk of being misconstrued and should be avoided.
11. Safeguard: As an extra precaution, consider keeping records of all private meetings, and let some other adult besides his or her spouse know that the conversations are occurring, as well as the reasons for the conversations.

Discipline Guidelines

The primary means of discipline is the development of a healthy and respectful relationship between the adults leading the program and the children or young people involved. Therefore, adults should do all they can to foster respect and care in their program. As well, those adults should engage in praying regularly for the youth in their program, and treat the youth as they would like to be treated. But there are times when the usual methods of maintaining order appropriate to the setting fail. If this is the case, then the following procedure should be used:

1. Under no circumstances shall any of the prohibited conduct under these Standards for Conduct be used as a means of discipline.
2. A misbehaving child should not be restrained unless he or she is about to harm another person in the program.
3. If someone is disrupting a program, he or she should be warned verbally. If he or she has to be warned a second time during the session of the program, the teacher/leader should speak to the child one-on-one when that session is finished.
4. If the youth persists in being disruptive in succeeding weeks, the teacher/leader should contact the parents/guardians. If appropriate, the parent/guardian should stay with the child in class for at least one period.
5. If the child persists in being disruptive in succeeding weeks, he or she shall be forbidden to attend the program until after he or she, his or her parents (or guardians), and the pastor have met to work through the problem. As part of that meeting a written contract for appropriate behavior and consequences for misbehavior shall be drawn up and signed by the child and his/her parents/guardians.
6. If the child violates the contract, consequences for violation shall be enacted including expulsion from the program for the year.

Special Nursery Procedures

In addition to the above Standards of Conduct, the following procedures are to be used for the nursery for all church-wide services and functions.

1. There should always be at least one nursery Worker and one volunteer in the nursery area whenever it is in use. Those who serve in the nursery (adults, teens, youth) are expected to be in the nursery at their assigned times. No one who is not scheduled should be in the nursery (Number five below is the exception). If unable to fulfill their commitment, they are to find a suitable substitute from the approved substitute list only and communicate the substitution to the Director of Children's Ministry.
2. Nursery Workers are expected to be in the nursery fifteen minutes prior to services or church functions unless otherwise specified and to remain until all children have been picked up.
3. The names of the people serving in the nursery may be posted at the entrance to the nursery.
4. Parents/guardians are to bring toddlers to the split door and hand the child to the nursery Worker. At this time, the child will be signed in, his or her belongings checked, the child will receive a numbered ID badge and the parent will receive a matching parent ID tag. At pick up time, children will be handed to the parent/guardian with the appropriate ID tag at the split door.
5. Parents/guardians of infants will be allowed to enter the nursery to remove infant outer wear (if necessary) and settle the baby in a swing, walker, crib, etc.
6. Parents/guardians are to label clearly all of the child's belongings--diaper bags, bottles, pacifiers, burp cloths, diapers, etc. Belongings should be placed out of reach of children.

7. The bottom half of the nursery door should remain closed so that the children do not run into the hallways. The top half should remain open to allow for visibility and air circulation.
8. If a child needs to go to the bathroom, only the children's bathrooms in the nursery are to be used. Only paid workers should assist a child going to the bathroom and the bathroom door must remain open a crack at all times.
9. Nursery Workers will sign a sheet whenever they change a diaper. In addition, a sticker will be given to each child that has been changed.
10. Toys are to be picked up and put away neatly. Any broken toys must be given to the Director of Children's Ministry for removal and/or repair.

If a Nursery Worker does not follow these procedures, that person will be reminded of the correct policy by the Director of Children's Ministry. If the guidelines continue to be broken by that Worker, steps will be taken to notify that Worker to no longer work in the nursery.

IV. Child Abuse Prevention

Explanation of Topic

What is Child Abuse?

In Pennsylvania, the law defines child abuse as any of the following when committed upon a child under 18 years of age by a perpetrator:

- Any recent act or failure to act which causes non-accidental serious physical injury
- An act or failure to act which causes non-accidental serious mental injury or sexual abuse or sexual exploitation
- Any recent act, failure to act or series of such acts or failure to act which creates an imminent risk of serious physical injury, sexual abuse or sexual exploitation
- Serious physical neglect which endangers a child's life or development or impairs a child's functioning

Why Be Proactive?

Sexual abuse of children can cause significant pain and long term suffering, including abnormal fears, post traumatic stress disorder, aggressive behavior, depression, poor self-esteem, and diffused sexual identity. And the consequences of child sexual abuse frequently plague victims into adulthood. When church leaders, pastors, or respected congregational leaders perpetrate the abuse, lifelong religious confusion and deep feelings of enmity toward God and the church can occur.

Reporting Child Abuse or Suspected Child Abuse

The Senior Pastor, the Director of Children's Ministry, along with one other man (currently Kevin Sanders) and two women (currently Jody Bishop and Christie Wilkin) selected by Session, will be designated as "safe people" and will be introduced as such to the children and the congregation. Workers, Children, and other members of the congregation will be encouraged to report abuse, suspected abuse, or any alleged incidence of abuse to one of the safe people.

It is not the responsibility of the reporting person to substantiate the alleged abuse but only to report it to the safe people.

Any allegation of abuse will be taken seriously. When a report is made that gives reasonable cause to believe that abuse may have occurred, the following people will be notified:

- Senior Pastor (if not the alleged abuser)
- Director of Children's Ministry
- Session
- PA Department of Human Resources, Office of Children, Youth, and Family Services
Child Protective Services and/or local police
- The church's insurance carrier
- Parents/guardians of the allegedly offended Youth (if not the accused)
- The accused person after the security of the allegedly offended Youth is guaranteed
- Denominational authorities (if the alleged abuser is the pastor)

If necessary, other people directly involved may be notified. The allegation of abuse will remain within the confidence of these parties.

The pastoral staff will maintain records of reported allegations of abuse, which must be kept secure and confidential.

If the alleged abuser is an ordained EPC pastor, he will be subject to oversight by the presbytery. If the alleged abuser is another staff member, officer or volunteer, he or she is subject to being suspended from the church position (with full pay for staff) and without prejudice pending an investigation and/or hearing.

The church will cooperate fully with any investigation done by legal authorities. All persons involved in a particular case, including their families, will be supported as appropriate with pastoral and professional counseling/care throughout the hearing, investigation and/or legal processes.