

# **Christ Presbyterian Church Children's Ministry Handbook**

## **WELCOME!**

What a privilege it is to minister to the children that God has blessed us with at Christ Presbyterian Church (CPC). We care deeply about the sons and daughters entrusted to our care and desire to help lead them to a love for Jesus and His gospel that is rooted in the Bible and God's grace. We thank our volunteers for supporting our families by acting as covenant parents, as well as helping to teach and nurture children within the church community. Our prayer is that they grow into healthy, faith-filled adults who worship and glorify God in all of life.

## **COMMITMENT TO OUR CHILDREN**

In Scripture, the care of children is very important. God equates "receiving" children with "receiving" Him (Matt. 18:5-6). God's word showcases He has a particular concern for the weak and vulnerable (Mic. 6:8; Isa. 61:1), and children are among the most vulnerable entrusted to our care. Further, Jesus loves the teachable souls of children, and He is not pleased with those who harm them (Prov. 22:6; Matt. 18:6; Luke 18:15-17; Mark 10:13-16; Eph. 6:4, 18; Col. 3:21). In James 1:27, it tells us that caring for children in need pleases God.

Safeguarding the physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of young people and other vulnerable individuals is among the most important responsibilities of the local church (WCF Q:138, 139).

As we serve our children, it is our goal to:

1. Love our children as Christ loves them.
2. Set an example of proper Christian conduct in the way we live our own lives.
3. Be prepared, so the time spent with them is meaningful and impacts them with the gospel.
4. Provide a physically safe and nurturing environment for our children.

In order to achieve these goals, the purpose of this handbook is to lay out the policies, procedures and expectations for providing care for our covenant children when they are participating in a function or program in or around our building located at 135 Whitney Ave., New Haven, Connecticut. This handbook also aims to protect our children, our volunteers, staff, & CPC as the body of Christ. The Session (governing body of CPC) reserves the right to change or update these policies at any time. The Session will inform parents, volunteers, and staff of any changes hereto.

## **VOLUNTEERS**

CPC encourages all members and regular attenders to support our parents in their task of raising children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord by serving in the nursery on Sunday morning. Any member or regular attender may decline serving in the nursery for any reason. The Session, in their sole discretion, may stipulate that a person not volunteer in any child or youth activity.

### **REQUIREMENTS FOR VOLUNTEERS**

#### **Those who volunteer must meet the following requirements:**

1. Be a member in good standing, or have regularly attended CPC for at least 6 months, prior to volunteering.
2. Review the policies and procedures contained in this handbook and sign an attestation that they have done so.
3. Participate in the Ministry Safe Training prior to volunteering.
4. Participate in the yearly review training and any special training held by CPC.
5. Submit to Federal Background Checks.

Exception: minors aged 13-17, who are the children of a member or regular attender, may volunteer in the nursery after meeting with the nursery coordinator and reviewing this handbook. Minors aged 13-14 should serve with at least one of their parents. Minors ages 15-17, may count toward the number of volunteers needed in the nursery.

**Nursery Team Leaders:** In addition to the above requirements, all Nursery Team Leaders will submit to a Connecticut DCF check.

#### **Sunday School Teachers will meet the following requirements:**

1. All requirements for volunteers listed above, including the Federal and State background checks.
2. Complete the CPC Theology class.
3. Pass a Sunday School Teacher examination by the Session.

**Pastors, Session Members, and Women's Leadership Board Members will also submit to the Federal and State Background checks and complete the Ministry Safe training.**

### **GENERAL INTERACTIONS FOR VOLUNTEERS WITH CHILDREN**

As the body of Christ, we want to encourage healthy relationships between our children and other members of the body. 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.

**Appropriate interactions (accompanied by good judgment):**

- Appropriately supervising or attending to children's needs
- Praise, compliments, or encouragement
- Handshakes, high-fives and fist bumps
- A brief, assuring pat on the head, back or shoulder
- Walking hand-in-hand with young children
- Hand holding during prayer
- Side hugs (an arm around the shoulder)
- Brief front hugs (within sight of others; best if child initiated)
- Infants and toddlers may be held, hugged, rocked and have their backs rubbed

**Inappropriate interactions (not an exhaustive list):**

- Significant distraction or not attending to the children's needs
- Insults, name-calling, or harsh/humiliating punishments
- Any act designed to humiliate, demean, or inflict emotional harm
- Corporal punishment or physical abuse
- Sexual abuse or any contact for sexual gratification
- Tickling or wrestling
- Kissing
- Rubbing/massaging a child older than toddler (age 4+)
- Prolonged or lingering hugs or other close physical contact not allowed above
- Lap sitting with a child older than toddler (age 4+)
- Carrying a child (including "piggy-back" rides) who is not an infant or toddler (age 4+) unless initiated by the child. Regardless, this practice shouldn't be encouraged and brought to a close as soon as possible.

**DISCIPLINE**

Volunteers should promote a loving, respectful, and orderly atmosphere in which children can worship, learn, play, and interact with others by:

1. proactively reminding children of and directing them toward acceptable activities,
2. verbally encouraging and reinforcing positive behavior,
3. and, when necessary, redirecting inappropriate behavior.

If a child is having difficulty following instructions or is being repeatedly disruptive, the child may be asked to take a break in a different area of the room for a set time or until the child is ready to participate appropriately. If none of these measures is effective, or the child exhibits behavior that could be harmful to themselves or others, the child's parent will be contacted. If a child has been bitten or injured by another child, the Nursery Coordinator or Sunday School Coordinator should be notified, who in turn will notify the parents of both children.

## **SUNDAY MORNING POLICIES**

CPC strongly believes in the importance of assisting parents in educating children (and ourselves) in the nurture and admonition of the Lord and so provides Sunday School in addition to corporate worship for all, ages 2 through adult, with age-appropriate curriculum for each demographic (see 'Sunday School Policies', below).

CPC encourages parents to teach their children to participate in Sunday Morning worship as soon as they are able. CPC realizes that children will make noises during the service as they are learning to worship the Lord. If a child needs to be taken out of the service, please do not remain in the foyer – noise from the foyer echoes into the sanctuary. In addition to the nursery, the fellowship hall and parlor are available for nursing moms or for a child who needs to calm down. The service is livestreamed into the parlor so you can give your child some space to spread out while you can still hear the service. You will find a child's bulletin available in the foyer outside of the sanctuary to help assist in enabling children to worship with us. The nursery is available to parents to help assist with childcare during the Sunday morning worship service and occasionally during additional special programming. CPC does not have any age limits for children to attend the nursery.

We wish for all attendees and nursery volunteers to be present for the Lord's supper and so do ask that if your child is in nursery, that you pick your child up at the end of the sermon.

## **NURSERY POLICIES**

To maintain the safety of our children, the only people permitted in the nursery are the children to be cared for, their parents, and nursery volunteers. The nursery will have at least 4 volunteers each Sunday. Two of the volunteers will be present at all times. One of the volunteers will be a Nursery Team Leader. In general, volunteers will not take children out of the nursery area. The two exceptions to this are as follows:

1. Weather permitting, two volunteers may take children out to the playground.
2. A volunteer may take an older child into the hallway right outside the nursery to discuss a behavior problem. The volunteer and child will remain within sight of the nursery.

Doors from the outside that are in the nursery and in the hallway adjacent to the nursery are to remain locked at all times. No one should unlock and let someone in through these doors other than children and volunteers returning from the playground.

**Dropping off & Picking Up:** In order to protect the children in our care, each child must be signed into the nursery by a parent or guardian. Upon signing in the child, please fill out the sticker with the child's name, parent's phone number, toileting and allergy information. A corresponding sticker will be retained by the parent/guardian and exchanged at the end of the service when picking up the child:

1. The parent/guardian will sign out the child.
2. The volunteer will bring the child to the door and remove the child's sticker.

Ordinarily, only the parent/guardian who signed the child into the nursery and has the corresponding number will be permitted to retrieve the child. Please do not send an older child to pick up a younger child. All children should be picked up at the end of the sermon. Our volunteers wish to join the service to participate in communion; please promptly pick up your child so they may do so.

**Toilet Policies:** Please change children who are in diapers and assist children with using the bathroom prior to dropping them off in the nursery. Nursery volunteers will not change diapers unless a change is necessitated by a dirty diaper or leakage. Only the Nursery Team Leader will change diapers and a 2<sup>nd</sup> adult will be present when diaper changing is occurring. Older children may use the bathroom located adjacent to the nursery. The door shall remain slightly ajar. If a child needs assistance, only the Nursery Team Leader will assist, and the door will remain open. If a parent prefers that they are the only one to change or assist the child with going to the bathroom, please note this on the sticker when dropping off the child. The parent will be contacted if the child needs help while in the nursery.

**Behavior:** Parents will be notified of any injuries to, or persistent behavior problems with their child that are difficult to address in the classroom setting, or between their child and another child. If needed, a First Aid Kit is located in the small kitchen adjacent to the nursery.

## **Sunday School Policies**

Doors to the Sunday School classrooms will remain ajar unless there are 2 adults and at least 2 students in the classroom. If only one child is present for a class, the Sunday School teacher will ask the parent's preference whether to hold the class one on one, or to join another class. For a one-on-one class, the teacher and student will hold the class in a public area such as the church library, or within sight of another class. If a child in the 2s or 3s class needs to use the bathroom, the policies listed above under the nursery shall be followed. The fellowship hall bathrooms across from the classroom shall be used.

## **Evacuation**

In the event of an emergency, Volunteers are responsible for leading the children in their room safely out of the building. The general evacuation plan for all sites is as follows:

1. Have the children in your room form a line. Younger children should pair-up and hold hands or be given something to grab onto (e.g. a rope with handholds). Infant and non-walkers should be carried or pushed in strollers.
2. Verify against a child roster or check-in records that all children are accounted for in your room. Take the roster/record with you when you leave.

3. With one staff/volunteer at the beginning of the line and another at the end, lead the children out of the building.
4. Once outside, lead the children a safe distance from the building or to any location agreed upon for your site.
5. Recheck attendance to make sure that everyone is accounted for and await further instructions.

Note: Parents should evacuate the building utilizing the nearest exit, then find their children once outside. Parents flooding the children's areas would cause congestion and prevent the children from being safely evacuated from the building.

## **Policies for Church Communication with Older Children**

Volunteers who work with our middle and high school children may wish to communicate with them one on one, and or via text. This will only occur with the parents' consent. Such communication will usually have the goal of accomplishing a task or arranging logistics. Communication will be via group text if appropriate. In general, if ongoing communication is necessary, the communication should be between the child and a volunteer of the same sex. Any one on one meetings will take place in a public place.

### **Concerns:**

Should any parent, volunteer, child, member, or attender want to address a concern related to a child in nursery or Sunday school, they can contact any of the individuals listed below.

Depending on the concern, please contact

1. The Sunday School Teacher
2. The Nursery Team Leader on duty that day
3. Nursery Coordinator
4. Sunday School Ministry Coordinator

If the concern is not resolved, please contact the Session or Pastor of Children & Families.

## **Abuse or Neglect of Children**

It is our hope and prayer that all of a child's interactions at CPC will be positive, nurturing and show the love of the Lord. However, we recognize that we live in a fallen world and that there are those who may harm our children.

To best prevent this, we will observe the following:

1. Strive to conduct all activities in areas open to observation.
2. Have periodic, unannounced visits by trained volunteers routinely made to the classroom.
3. One to one contacts or meetings will be conducted in public and only after the consent of the parents.
4. If a volunteer is impaired in any way, a substitute will be found and the volunteer will not serve.

CPC has a zero-tolerance policy for any type of abuse or neglect. Connecticut defines physical abuse of a child as a child who has been inflicted with physical injury or injuries other than by accidental means, is in a condition which is the result of maltreatment such as, but not limited to, malnutrition, sexual molestation, deprivation of necessities, emotional maltreatment or cruel punishment, and/or has injuries at variance with the history given of them. Sexual abuse is defined as any incident involving a child's non-accidental exposure to sexual behavior. Emotional abuse is defined as act(s), statement(s), or threats, which has had, or is likely to have an adverse impact on the child, and/or interferes with a child's positive emotional development. The State defines physical neglect of a child as a child who: has been abandoned, is being denied proper care and attention physically, educationally, emotionally, or morally, is being permitted to live under conditions, circumstances or associations injurious to his well-being, or has been abused. Emotional Neglect of a child is the denial of proper care and attention, or failure to respond, to a child's affective needs by the person responsible for the child's health, welfare or care; which has an adverse impact on the child or seriously interferes with a child's positive emotional development. More information and examples can be found at <https://portal.ct.gov/DCF/1-DCF/Child-Abuse-and-Neglect-Definitions>.

CPC will cooperate with legal authorities and report any suspected child abuse or neglect. All volunteers will receive ongoing training regarding abuse and neglect. If abuse or neglect is suspected, please **IMMEDIATELY** report the suspected abuse or neglect to one of the people listed below:

1. Nursery Coordinator
2. Sunday School Ministry Coordinator
3. Pastor of Children and Families
4. Any Session or WLB member

Studies have shown that one of the best ways to prevent or to stop ongoing abuse is for parents to speak to their children about abuse and how to be safe in an age-appropriate way. CPC has resources available to help assist parents in these discussions. Please see the CPC website and the CPC bookstore located in the Fellowship Hall for these resources and other recommended parenting books.

CPC may allow a person known to be a sexual offender to remain or become a member of the congregation, but they must adhere to specific guidelines.

1. A registered sexual offender cannot participate in any of the child or youth programs in any way.
2. While participating in church-related activities, a known sexual offender must comply with any requirements set out by the Session which may include the need to report and be accompanied by another adult.
3. CPC reserves the right to disclose the identity of the sexual offender to the congregation.

Nothing above shall limit the Session from imposing additional requirements on a registered sexual offender nor from imposing similar requirements on a suspected sexual offender.

## CPC Volunteer Expectations & Agreement

We are excited and grateful to have you partner with the church as we nurture and teach the youngest in our community. This handbook is intended to help you serve joyfully and confidently by knowing what to expect during your time together with the children and providing clear policies and procedures to follow. Therefore, we ask that you read this handbook carefully and apply these things as you care for the children within the church.

We also ask those who serve with our children to commit to:

- Arrive on-time for service and communicate any last-minute emergencies to the Nursery Team Leader and Nursery Coordinator for that Sunday.
- Care for the children in a way that models God's love for them.
- Using appropriate interactions with children and refrain from any inappropriate interactions (as outlined above)
- Spend your time with the children engaging them in meaningful ways (e.g. playing with young children, reading Bible stories with enthusiasm, sharing about living out your faith with older kids).
- When applicable, be a prepared teacher, reading and meditating on the lesson or Scripture in advance, for God's work in our hearts and lives overflows to our students.
- Be responsive to volunteer emails and follow protocols when scheduling conflicts arise.
- Refrain from cell phone and other device usage in children's rooms except as allowed in this handbook (e.g. contacting parents, calling 911). Phones should be on vibrate/silent.
- Make an effort to attend training sessions for those working with children when offered.

I have received a copy of the Christ Presbyterian Church Child Handbook & Protection Policies. I acknowledge that I have read and become familiar with the information contained herein.

·  
Print Name

·  
Signature

·  
Date

Parent Name (co-signing on behalf of minor)

· Parent Signature (co-signing on behalf of minor)

· Date