

West Hills Presbyterian (PCA)  
Child Protection Policies And Practices (rev. 5.24.22)

The Gospel of Mark records that when people brought little children to Jesus, he took them in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them (Mark 10:16). It is our desire to bring children to Jesus, too.

Because we recognize that we are a reflection of God's love to those in our care, we take seriously our responsibility to them. These guidelines are set forth to provide a safe and nurturing environment in which we can bring our children to the Savior.

We view ourselves as partners with parents, seeking to provide quality care and instruction in our children's and youth ministries. All of our guidelines are designed to promote growth in God for each child, youth and adult involved.

Everyone who teaches, helps, or cares for children/youth under the sponsorship of WHPC must follow these policies and procedures. Our children are God's precious gift to us. It is our desire to provide a safe and loving environment for them to experience God and the joy of learning more about how much God loves them. That is why the leadership of WHPC has set up the following guidelines to be followed during all Children's Ministry and Youth programs of WHPC.

It is our hope that these policies will serve as a guide for those caring for our precious children and as an encouragement for the parents leaving their children in our care.

The standard of excellence to which we will strive in caring for the children entrusted to us is founded upon a biblical understanding of purity in relationships. These policies are for the protection of volunteers, the church, and especially for the children. We are not only to avoid sin, but also even the appearance of sin.

Child abuse is a problem today – even for the church. It is important to us to provide a safe, secure, and loving environment for children and youth where God is honored in every relationship and where parents feel comfortable leaving their children. These policies are intended to protect both the children and volunteer workers and are intended to be a helpful resource in addressing the issues of child safety. All workers are expected to adhere to the following policies, regardless of their area of ministry. ANY EXCEPTIONS TO THESE POLICIES MUST HAVE THE PRIOR WRITTEN CONSENT OF THE PARENTS INVOLVED AND THE PRIOR PERMISSION OF THE SENIOR PASTOR OR DESIGNATED REPRESENTATIVE.

Throughout this policy a child will be defined as anyone under the age of 18.

## **1. VOLUNTEER QUALIFICATIONS**

- a. All people in teaching or leading children roles must be a member of West Hills Presbyterian Church (WHPC) and must have been attending WHPC for at least six months. These roles include but are not limited to Nursery caregivers, Sunday School teachers, VBS teachers, Children's Worship assistants, Wednesday Evening Table Hosts, Wednesday Evening Teachers and youth group workers.
- b. All volunteer teachers and leaders must be 18 years of age or older.
- c. Teenagers (13-17 year olds) may serve as "helpers" to adult teachers and leaders in select non-nursery (ages 4 years and older), children's ministry programs and activities at the discretion and approval of the Child Protection Action Team and permission from their parents. Such activities include but are not limited to : VBS, Camp Outs, Lock-ins, and Summer Programs.
- d. All teachers and leaders who work with children must complete a Children's and Youth Ministry Volunteer Application, submit three references and be interviewed.
- e. A criminal records check will be done on all professional church staff, paid and volunteers who work with children or youth. Any person meeting any of, but not limited to, the following conditions will be prohibited from working with children or youth:
  1. Any person who has been denied legal custody of children for reasons of abuse or neglect.
  2. Any person who has been convicted for any felony, violent crime or any crime against a child.
  3. Any person who has been disciplined for, or convicted of, any unlawful sexual conduct, abuse, child abuse, child neglect and/or child sexual abuse.
  4. Any person who is currently a defendant under process for any of the offenses previously identified.
  5. Any person who is currently registered or has ever been required to register as a sex offender in any jurisdiction, or whose name has ever appeared on a Sex Offender Registry.

6. Any individual who does not fall under the conditions cited above, but who has been either accused of, or charged with, any criminal activity and/or abuse / neglect of a child but never adjudicated, must be approved by the Session, on a case by case basis, before he can be permitted to work with children or youth.

f. All teachers and leaders working with children or youth must complete an orientation training program.

## 2. APPLICATION PROCEDURES

- a. A **Volunteer Application** is available from the church office or from the Director of Children's Ministry. Every volunteer in the children's and/or youth ministry must complete and turn in a signed application, and be interviewed by the appropriate Ministry Director.
- b. **Background Checks:** A criminal records check for persons 18 years and older will be conducted through an agency authorized to perform a security background check. The results of the criminal records check will be reviewed by the background check service administrators.
- c. **References:** References provided on the application form may not include relatives. References will be contacted and interviewed by the designated ministry personnel.
- d. **Interviews:** Volunteer interviews will be conducted by the appropriate designated ministry personnel.
- e. **Confidentiality:** All personal information voluntarily disclosed, the result of the criminal records check, or the refusal of any person to participate in a program or activity in lieu of such disclosure requirements in most cases will be considered confidential. The results of the criminal records check will be reviewed by the background check service administrators.
- f. **Storage of confidential records:** All records, including all volunteer applications, reference interviews, and results of all criminal records checks will be kept in a secure storage cabinet. Any request by a volunteer to purge information from his or her file will be honored; however, the fact that information was purged will be noted in the file and the individual will no longer be permitted to serve in children or youth ministries. Volunteer profiles and records checks may be required to be updated from time to time, but only if the worker is still a current volunteer. Only the Session, Director Of Children's Ministries, and background check service administrators will have access to these files.
- g. **All volunteers** must have the approval of the Session or their designee, before being placed in any position of ministry to children/youth.

## 3. VOLUNTEER IDENTIFICATION

- a. All volunteers must wear any designated identification whenever serving in our children's ministry.
- b. Do not allow unauthorized individuals into your classroom or ministry area, or entrust children to their care. Please direct them to a staff member instead.

## 4. Code of Conduct:

### a. Visibility

All work with children shall be planned in a way that minimizes risks as far as possible. This includes being visible to other adults when working with children.

This can be accomplished by planning activities in areas where other adults are present and at a time when other activities are occurring. It can also be accomplished by installing windows in all classrooms and other rooms used by children, or by keeping doors open.

### b. Overcoming Isolation

At least two unrelated adults shall be present when working with children. When this is not possible, reduce isolation by having a minimum of two children present, informing the child's parents of your meeting, and doing it during a time and/or in a location where your interaction with the child is visible to others. Isolation could be overcome, for example, by taking two or more children to the bathroom together rather than only one, dropping off siblings last in a carpool, or taking your own child or spouse along when providing rides. An adequate number of adults will supervise youth events, especially overnight activities.

### **c. Accountability**

When ministry to a child involves one-on-one contact, the following procedures shall be followed, as applicable. Always be accountable to other adults regarding your interactions with youth or children. Counseling or other necessarily confidential meetings with children shall be done in an office with a window in the door and only when another adult is in close vicinity, aware that the meeting is occurring, and willing to stay in the vicinity until it is completed.

Parents and/or supervisors are to be notified beforehand of any activities with youth or children. For example, before transporting a youth or child, keeping a child after school or a youth activity, or when tutoring a child or youth. In an emergency situation, find someone to go with you if at all possible, or notify whoever is available.

### **d. Parental Involvement**

Parents are responsible for knowing where their children are at all times. Therefore, parents shall be informed of planned activities (e.g. trips, overnights, etc) and asked to sign a consent form. Parents shall be encouraged to make unannounced visits to program activities, as this also reduces the risk of abuse.

### **e. Supervision**

Supervision also reduces risk. Program administrators shall periodically and randomly inspect classrooms, offices, work areas and other areas where children and adults are together.

### **f. Technology**

Technology should be used appropriately to protect children or youth from abuse and exploitation. For example, guidelines should be in place to prevent downloading pornographic material from the Internet. Prevent access to inappropriate emails, chat rooms, or movies.

### **g. Discipline**

Discipline should be used to teach and correct rather than punish. It should not include slapping, hitting, ridiculing, yelling at, or belittling a child. **Please refer to discipline policy for your specific ministry area (Sunday School, Elementary, Youth).**

### **h. Touch**

Because healthy, caring touch is valuable to children but unhealthy touch is abusive, the following guidelines apply:

- Touch shall be open rather than secretive.
- A hug in the context of a group is very different from a hug behind closed doors.
- Touch should be in response to the need of the child, and not the need of the adult.
- Touch should be age-appropriate and generally initiated by the child rather than the adult.
- It should be with the child's permission and any resistance from the child should be respected.
- Touch should always communicate respect for the child.

Adults should avoid doing things of a personal nature for children that they are able to do for themselves, including dressing, bathing, etc.

Adults and other youth or children should not hit, slap, pinch, push, hold against their will, or otherwise assault children.

*The following signs of affection are generally appropriate within specific contexts:*

- verbal praise, side hugs, shoulder to shoulder hugs, pats on the shoulder, back, or head (when culturally appropriate).
- for smaller children, touching their hands, faces, shoulders and arms, arms around their shoulders, hugs, or holding them when others are present.

*The following behaviors between staff or volunteers and children are inappropriate or may be perceived as inappropriate and shall not be engaged in:*

- touching buttocks, chests, genital areas, or thighs;
- showing affection in isolated areas or when alone with a child;
- sleeping in bed with a child;
- inappropriate comments that relate to physique or body development;
- flirtatious or seductive looks;
- any form of affection that is unwanted by the child;
- showing sexually-suggestive videos or playing sexually-suggestive games with any

child;

- any behavior that could be interpreted as sexual in nature.

Adults shall monitor each other in the area of physical contact, helping each other by pointing out anything that could be misinterpreted.

**i. Verbal Interaction**

Words can also be used to support and encourage a child, such as praise, positive reinforcement, and appropriate jokes. Inappropriate verbal interaction includes the following: ridiculing, belittling, humiliating, name calling, using harsh language that may frighten, threaten or humiliate the child, cursing, or making derogatory remarks about the child.

Inappropriate verbal interaction also includes telling off-color or sexual jokes, making sexually suggestive comments, telling inappropriate secrets, or inappropriately discussing sexual encounters or desires with children. Adults shall avoid favoring or showing differential treatment to particular children or youth to the exclusion of others.

## **5. RESTROOM PROCEDURES**

**a. For Rooms 101, 102, 103**

Children who have classes/programs in rooms 101,102,103 are to use the restroom located in their classroom. Classes meeting in those rooms will typically have nursery age through 1<sup>st</sup> grade age children. Restroom doors should be “cracked” open with an adult standing nearby. Adults may “tend” to the “needs” of a child if the door is fully open. Adults should always let children fulfill the tasks of which they are capable.

**b. For 1<sup>st</sup> -5th graders in all other rooms:**

- i. During Sunday School: Parents should ensure that children use the restroom immediately prior to class. Children will not be permitted to use the restroom during Sunday School class time unless both adults in the classroom take the class as a group to the appropriate restrooms. Adults should never enter a stall with a child and close the stall door. Adults may monitor use of the restroom only when the outside door is open as they stand in the doorway.
- ii. During Children’s Worship: Children will be taken as a group to use the restroom prior to entering the Children’s Worship classroom. Children will not be permitted to use the restroom during Children’s Worship unless both adults in the classroom take the class as a group to the appropriate restrooms. Adults should never enter a stall with a child and close the stall door. Adults may monitor use of the restroom only when the outside door is open as they stand in the doorway.
- iii. Wednesday Evening Programs : Parents or “Table Hosts” should ensure that children use the restroom immediately prior to class. The preferred operating position is that children will not be permitted to use the restroom during Wednesday evening programs . If there are less than 4 adults in the classroom/program area, the class may only be taken as a group to the restroom. If at least 4 adults are present 2 adults may escort the child/children to the restroom. Adults should never enter a stall with a child and close the stall door. Adults may monitor use of the restroom only when the outside door is open as they stand in the doorway.
- iv. Programs/Events taking place in the Family Activity Center (FAC): Adults may allow children to use the restrooms located in the lobby of the FAC. Adults may enter the restroom to monitor use only when the outside door is open as they stand in the doorway. Adults should never enter a stall with a child and close the stall door. If there are 2 or fewer adults supervising the program/event, the adult should not enter the restroom unless there is a medical emergency or the 2<sup>nd</sup> adult and remaining children assemble outside of the restroom.

### **c. For Middle School/High School Classes And Programs:**

- i. Middle School and High School aged children may use the restroom without supervision. Teacher/leaders will do their best to ensure that only one child of either gender is using the restroom at any given time.

## **6. EVENT PLANNING / APPROVED ACTIVITIES**

- a. Whenever moving children from the classroom, do a head count upon departure and arrival to make sure every child is accounted for.
- b. Workers are never to take a child to their the worker's home. Workers may transport children in church owned vehicles and/or personal vehicles only when written permission has been granted by the parent/guardian and only when 2 adults are present in the vehicle.
- c. Never take a child or children outside of the church building or program room without prior consent of the ministry leader. Any activity off the premises of the church property will require written permission of the parent or guardian.
- d. A minimum of two approved adult leaders is required for any trip or out-of-class activity.
- e. When an activity requires travel, all drivers must have a valid driver's license, current automobile insurance and approval in advance to transport children (based on investigation of driving record). The number of persons per car should not exceed the number of seatbelts. Each driver should have a copy of the activity permission slip for those students riding in his/her car. Emergency contact phone numbers are of primary concern and shall be available to the leaders. All drivers must be a minimum of 21 years old.
- f. Overnight Policies
  - All overnight events must be accompanied by at least 2 approved, unrelated staff.
  - All overnight events should be pre-approved by the appropriate paid staff member (Children's Ministry Director / Youth Director)
  - Supervising adults are never to sleep in a closed room one-on-one with any children/youth attending the event.
  - If both male and female students are attending the overnight activity, there must be at least one male and one female-approved adults present. There must be at least one supervising adult awake at all times during the event

## **7. EXCEPTIONS**

Any requests for exceptions to the above noted policies should be directed to the appropriated ministry related personnel

## **8. Medical Considerations**

### **a. Accidental Injuries to Children**

In the event that a child or youth is injured while under our care, the following steps should be followed:

1. For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, workers will provide First Aid (Band-Aids, etc.) as appropriate and will notify the child's parent or guardian of the injury at the time the child is picked up from our care.
2. For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple First Aid, the parent and/or guardian will immediately be summoned in addition to the worker's supervisor. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.

3. Once the child has received appropriate medical attention, an incident report will be completed in the case of injuries requiring treatment by a medical professional.

#### **b. Sick Child Policy**

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all of the children at **West Hills Presbyterian Church**. Parents are encouraged to be considerate of other children when deciding whether to place a child under our care. In general, children with the following symptoms should NOT be dropped off:

- Fever, diarrhea, or vomiting within the last 48 hours
- Green or yellow runny nose
- Eye or skin infections
- Other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease

Children who are observed by our workers to be ill will be separated from other children and the parent or guardian will be contacted to request that the child be picked up for the day.

#### **c. Medications**

It is the policy of **West Hills Presbyterian Church** not to administer either prescription or non-prescription medications to the children under our care. Medications should be administered by a parent at home. Parents are reminded of our sick child policy.

Exceptions to the medications policy may be granted to parents of children with potentially life-threatening conditions (such as asthma or severe allergic reactions). Parents of such children should address their situation with nursery attendant to develop a plan of action.

#### **d. First aid training**

It is the goal of the church that most paid employees who work with children will maintain current certification in basic first aid and basic CPR (or the equivalent) as required by applicable licensing requirements or other local regulations. The church will pay the cost of this training. Volunteer workers are encouraged, but not required to get training if they frequently accompany children on activities such as recreational activities, camps, retreats, mission trips or any other activity with element of risk.

### **9. Abuse Reporting Protocol**

When anyone has reason to suspect or has knowledge of child abuse within the scope of our work and ministry, he or she must make a report according to the outlined reporting protocol and state law mandates:

*Tennessee law at TCA Section 37-1-403 mandates that "Any person...having knowledge of or called upon to render aid to any child who is suffering from or has sustained any wound, injury, disability, or physical or mental condition which is of such a nature as to reasonably indicate that it has been caused by brutality, abuse or neglect or which on the basis of available information reasonably appears to have been caused by brutality, abuse or neglect, shall report such harm immediately, by telephone or otherwise,...".*

The report and the person making the report are kept confidential. Failure to make the required report constitutes a Class A misdemeanor.

**a.** An employee/volunteer is required to report suspected abuse to the Director Of Children's Ministries and/or Senior Pastor, and/or Clerk Of Session as soon as possible after the suspicion is noted. The reporter will need to fill out a *Report of Child Abuse* form which is available from any of the three above noted persons. The

reporter must also directly contact the TN Department of Children’s Services (DCS) The TN DCS Hotline number is 1-877-542-2873. Someone is available 24/7.

- b. In the event that an incident of child abuse or neglect is suspected as having occurred on the premises of the church or during a church sponsored program or activity, the following procedure shall be implemented by the Director Of Children’s Ministries unless he/she is alleged to be involved.
  - i. The church will comply with the state’s requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists.
  - ii. The parent(s) or legal guardian(s) of the minor shall be notified.
  - iii. The employee/volunteer alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave from working with church minors pending an investigation.
  - iiii. The church’s attorney and insurance company will be notified.
  - iv. If the suspected abuse involves an ordained pastor employed by the church, the Tennessee Valley Presbytery) will be notified and the Stated Clerk’s office will be made aware of the situation.
  - v. The church will cooperate fully with any investigation of the incident by state or local authorities.
  - vi. All reports of child abuse or neglect shall be treated with the utmost discretion and held in absolute confidence, to the extent that such is possible. No person shall communicate any information concerning the alleged event to any person except as necessary a) to comply with the church’s Child Protection Policy and/or the law or b) to cooperate with an official investigation of the alleged incident. Any breach of this confidentiality by a church employee/volunteer may be cause for immediate dismissal.

The Senior Pastor, after consultation with those conducting the official investigation of the incident, may authorize limited additional disclosure if necessary to protect other minors from harm in the near future, particularly where the person responsible for the abuse cannot be identified.

**But in no case shall the identity of the victim or the accused person be disclosed except as required by law.** Any person who is found guilty of the alleged child abuse or misconduct will be removed from their church employment/volunteer position with minors.

**Child Abuse Definitions, Symptoms, Indicators of Abuse\***

Child Abuse	Any mistreatment or neglect of a child that results in harm or injury.
Physical	Purposely <i>injuring</i> a child by any means, including hitting, biting, shaking, kicking, burning or throwing objects
Emotional	Consistent and/or extreme crushing of a child's spirit with verbal attacks, threats or humiliation
Sexual	Any sexual activity or contact with a child-whether in the home or by a caretaker, including on the street by a person unknown to the child. The abuser may be an adult, adolescent, or another child.
Neglect	Willingly failing to provide for a child's emotional or physical needs: failing to offer guidance and supervision.

**SYMPTOMS, INDICATORS OF ABUSE**

**The following signs and symptoms do not always mean abuse. Repeated incidents of injury combined with behavioral problems, inconsistent stories, etc. are typical indicators a family may need assistance.** Fears of a teacher, adult worker or relative, may indicate something unhealthy in the relationship.

<p><b>Physical</b></p>	<p>unexplained bruises, welts, broken bones cuts or scrapes, burns, missing hair injuries or redness around the genitals injuries at different stages of healing injury or medical condition that hasn't been properly treated bodily complaints related to stress-stomach aches, headaches, vomiting without cause suicidal gestures or self mutilation substance abuse or eating disorders appearance may be one of poor grooming and dirty, clothing may be in poor condition or not suited to the weather</p>
<p><b>Child's Behavior</b></p>	<p>aggressive or withdrawn behavior- especially as a shift in personality unusual fears (of certain people, going home, etc.) pulling out own hair, eyelashes or eyebrows craving for attention running away fatigue without physical cause and/or depression lack of concentration, school problems- misbehavior hunger, begging for food, stealing frequent tardiness or absence from school unusual knowledge of sex, explicit language, inappropriate behavior with peers, knowledge beyond developmental age regression to earlier behaviors such as thumb sucking, bed wetting, etc. afraid to be alone with certain people or "clingy" with other people pseudo-mature behavior</p>
<p><b>Adult's behavior</b></p>	<p>harsh punishment of child in public refer to the child as "difficult", "different" or "bad" seem unconcerned about the child give conflicting stories about injuries become defensive when asked about the child's health presence of family stressors - loss of job, financial difficulties, marital problems family history of violence or substance abuse parents who were physically or sexually abused as children families in which children or women are seen as possessions; male authoritarian and rigid households; also strongly religious homes in combination with these factors</p>

\*information adapted from the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect (<http://nccan.ch.acf.hhs.gov/topics/overview/index.cfm>) and from the Church Law and Tax Report *Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in Your Church*.