

## **General Purpose Statement**

Northminster Presbyterian Church seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the below practices, our goal is to protect the children/students of Northminster Presbyterian Church from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteers (workers) from false accusations.

## **Definitions**

For purposes of this policy, the terms “child” or “children”, “student” or “students” include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years. The term “worker” includes both paid and volunteer persons who work with children.

## **Selection of Workers**

All persons who desire to work with the children/students participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes the following:

### **a) Written Application**

All persons seeking to work with children/students must complete and sign a written application in a form to be supplied by us. The application will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with children, previous Northminster Presbyterian Church affiliation, reference and employment information, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. The application form will be maintained in confidence on file at the Northminster Presbyterian Church.

### **b) Personal Interview**

Upon completion of the application, a face-to-face interview may be scheduled with the applicant to discuss his/her suitability for the position.

### **c) Reference Checks**

Before an applicant is permitted to work with children, at least two of the applicants' references will be checked. These references should be of an institutional nature as opposed to personal or family references, preferably from organizations where the applicant has worked with children/students in the past. Documentation of the reference checks will be maintained in confidence on file at Northminster Presbyterian Church.

#### d) **Criminal Background Check**

A national criminal background check is required for all employees (regardless of position) and for the following categories of volunteers:

- Those who will be involved in overnight activities with children/students;
- Those counseling children/students;
- Those involved in one-on-one mentorship of children/students; and
- Those having occasional one-on-one contact with children/students (such as, church sponsored events and vehicle drivers).

Before a background check is run, prospective workers will be asked to sign an authorization form allowing the church to run the check. If an individual declines to sign the authorization form, s/he will be unable to work with children/students.

What constitutes a disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by the head Pastor or chair of the Staff Development Team on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. Generally, convictions for an offense involving children/students and/or for offenses involving violence will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children/students. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying event.

The background check authorization form and results will be maintained in confidence on file at the Northminster Presbyterian Church.

#### e) **Notification Process**

In the event it becomes known to a member of Session or an employee of Northminster that a person convicted of a disqualifying offense(s) is attending Northminster, that person shall notify the Head Pastor who shall notify Session and Program Staff. The person convicted of a disqualifying offense may not be a worker or volunteer with children.

## **Two Adult Rule**

It is our goal that a minimum of two unrelated adult workers will be in attendance at all times when children/students are being supervised during our programs and activities. Some youth classes may have only one adult teacher in attendance during the class session; in these instances, doors to the classroom should remain open.

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

For purposes of this policy, “child abuse” is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child’s physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes the following:

- **Physical abuse** – any physical injury to a child that is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.
- **Emotional abuse** – emotional injury when the child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.
- **Sexual abuse** – any sexual activity between a child and an adult or between a child and another child at least four years older than the victim, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.

- **Neglect** – depriving a child of his or her essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

Workers may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect of the children under our care. In the event that an individual involved in the care of children at Northminster Presbyterian Church becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child under his/her care, this should be reported immediately to the head Pastor or chair of the Staff Development Team for further action including reporting to authorities as may be mandated by state law.

In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at this Northminster Presbyterian Church or during our sponsored programs or activities, the following procedure shall be followed:

1. The parent or guardian of the child will be notified.
2. The worker alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave from working with children pending an investigation and instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation.
3. Civil authorities will be notified, and the Northminster Presbyterian Church will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists. The Northminster Presbyterian Church personnel will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities.
4. Our insurance company will be notified, and we will complete an incident report. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company.
5. The Church Administrator will be our spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect, unless he or she is alleged to be involved. We will seek the advice of legal counsel before responding to media inquiries or releasing information to the congregation. All other representatives of the church should refrain from speaking to the media.
6. A pastoral visit will be arranged for those who desire it.
7. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position working with children or youth.

## Teenage Workers

We recognize that there may be times when it is necessary or desirable for babysitters (paid or volunteer) who are themselves under age 18 to assist in caring for children during programs or activities. The following guidelines apply to teenage workers:

- Must be at least age 14
- Must have a personal interview
- Must complete a written application which includes reference checks

## Check-in/Check-out Procedure

Children from birth through preschool must be dropped off by a parent or other authorized person who shall sign that child in on the attendance form. Parents may note on the attendance form that other authorized persons may pick up their child from the event or program.

Elementary school aged children do not need to be signed in. Attendance will be taken in each class during every program on Sunday morning. Elementary children may be excused to a parent or to the conversation/fellowship hour.

## **Sick Child Policy**

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all of the children at Northminster 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.

## **Medications Policy**

It is the policy of Northminster 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 Director of Children's Education to develop a plan of action.

When on trips, parents will give permission for medication to be given. This will be included on trip permission forms and be maintained by the staff member during the trip.

## **Discipline Policy**

It is the policy of Northminster Presbyterian Church not to administer corporal punishment, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. There should be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other physical discipline of children. Workers should consult with Director of Children or Student Ministry, if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

In the event a child needs restraint for their own protection or the protection of others, only trained adults will administer restraint. Parents and staff member will be contact immediately by another worker. This restraint will not be punitive.

## **Photographs of Children**

It is the policy of Northminster Presbyterian Church that children under the age of 18 are not to be photographed by a staff member or volunteer care giver without the written permission of the child's parent, grandparent, caregiver or guardian. Photographs may be used by Northminster Presbyterian Church only with written permission by the child or student's parent or other authorized adult.

## Transportation of Children

It is the responsibility of the parents or guardians to provide safe transportation to and from Northminster Presbyterian Church events. However, Northminster Presbyterian Church may offer transportation for children/students.

All drivers of vehicles containing minors other than their own children must be at least 19 years of age, carry lawful auto insurance coverage, have a valid driver's license and provide functioning seat belts for everyone. When transporting young children, the driver must follow the state's laws for the use of car seats and booster seats and its regulations as to where children should be seated in the vehicle.

The need for seat belts supersedes the need for two adults to be in each vehicle.

Other than as set forth herein, a driver is not permitted to transport only one child/student in a vehicle without that child/student's parent or authorized adult's permission. If a child/student between the ages of 12-17 years old, requests a ride with a leader, the leader must communicate that request to the child/student's parent or other authorized adult.

Emergency contact information including name of physician, health insurance information and consent to treat in case of an emergency must be provided for any minor who is being transported by a Northminster worker/leader other than their parents.

No driver may be sleep-deprived, consume alcohol or use any form of drug that can affect physical or mental performance during or before carrying out his/her duty as a driver.

## Restroom Guidelines

Children five years of age and younger should use a classroom bathroom if one is available. If a classroom bathroom is not available, workers should escort a group of children to the hallway bathroom. They should always go in a group, never taking a child to the bathroom alone. The workers should check the bathroom first to make sure that it is empty, and then allow the children inside. The workers should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children back to the classroom. If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, the worker should open the bathroom door and call the child's name. If a child requires assistance, the workers should prop open the bathroom door, and leave the stall door open as they assist the child.

For children in grades 1-3 who request to use a bathroom, a worker should stand in the hallway and observe the child enter the bathroom and remain until the child leaves the bathroom. Older children may use the bathroom by themselves after informing the leader.

For the protection of all, workers should *never* be alone with a child in a bathroom with the door closed and never be in a closed bathroom stall with a child. Parents are strongly encouraged to have their children visit the bathroom prior to each class.

When children/students are off-site for any length of time, including Mission Trips, the leaders shall follow these guidelines unless the available facilities are insufficient to accommodate segregation in changing rooms, sleeping quarters and/or bathrooms. The overall purpose to protect children/students and leaders/workers remains in effect during the off-site activity.

## **Mission Trips**

Groups on mission trips both foreign and domestic, will attempt to meet the guidelines established in this policy to the best of their ability.

## **Boy Scouts of America**

Volunteer workers for units chartered to Northminster Presbyterian Church under agreement with the Boy Scouts of America are subject to the Youth Protection Policies of the Boy Scouts of America when serving in a Scouting capacity. The policies set forth herein are not applicable to the class of workers.

## **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.

## **Training**

**Northminster Presbyterian Church** will provide training on this child protection policy to all new workers and will strive to provide opportunities for additional training classes or events on an annual basis. All workers are strongly encouraged to attend these training events.

## **Policy Review**

A Policy Review Team shall be created and lead by the Church Business Administrator and include the Director of Children and Family Ministry, Director of Student Ministry and up to 2 members at large. The Child Protection Policy will be reviewed annually.