

Mission Presbytery Child and Youth Protection Policy | 2021

Approved by Mission Presbytery March 6, 2021

Rationale:

A Vision for Children and the Church 1993

Adopted by the 205th General Assembly,

*Because we affirm that all children are a gift of God, created by God and created good;
all children are a gift to the whole of the human community;
all children have a real faith, and gifts for ministry;
all children have the right to be children;
and all children are not just tomorrow, they are today.*

*Because we believe that all children depend upon adults for safety and security in a world that does not always value children;
all children are affected first and most deeply by those things that work against health and wholeness;
where there is disease, children sicken and die;
where there is homelessness, children sleep on the streets and in other dangerous places;
where there is war, children are frightened and without a safe place;
where their air and water are polluted, children feel the effect in their bodies and in their futures;
where there is shame, children's spirits are wounded.*

*Therefore we hope for a world where all children can find a safe place;
where all ages, races, genders, creeds, and abilities are recognized, valued, and celebrated;
where all adults hear the voices of children and speak with as well as for them;
where all children have "first call" on the world's resources and first place in the minds and hearts of the world's adults.*

*Because Jesus welcomed children and encouraged us to welcome them in his name;
Jesus lifted up a child as an example of what the realm of God is like;
Therefore, we hope for a church where we take seriously our baptismal vow to nurture all children committed to our care;
where we bring good news to all those places where children are in need;
where adults and children alike share in ministry.*

*We covenant to act so that this vision may be made real for all children,
now and in times to come.*

General Purpose Statement

Mission Presbytery seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for minors who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the following practices, our goal is to protect minors within Mission Presbytery 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 term “**minor**” includes all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years. The term “**child**” generally applies to minors from birth until 5th grade. The term “**youth**” generally applies to minors in grades 6-12. The term “**worker**” includes both paid and unpaid persons who work with minors in any capacity including but not limited to overnight activities, counseling, or one-on-one interaction. The term “**child abuse**” is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a minor’s physical, psychological or emotional health and development. The terms “**member of YCC**” or “**member of MPT**” include adult members of the Youth Connection Committee and the Midwinter Planning Team, respectively.

Selection of Workers

The Presbytery strongly urges each local church to adopt its own screening procedure, which includes a security background check to ensure the safety and protection of its own children and youth. The Presbytery relies on the local church session to fulfill its own responsibility to its children and youth. Individual congregations will be responsible for screening the adult sponsors they send to any Mission Presbytery events in a capacity to supervise minors. Mission Presbytery will abide by its own screening procedure for all workers who will serve as members of YCC, MPT, small group leaders, and other adult leadership not attending an event with a congregation. This screening includes the following:

- **Six Month Rule:** Ordinarily, adult volunteers and advisors/sponsors will only be permitted to serve as sponsors or volunteers with minors at a Presbytery event if they have been active participants in a congregation or ministry (such as UKirk) of Mission Presbytery for a minimum of six (6) months. An exception may be made if the person is transferring from active membership in a church outside Mission Presbytery where references can be obtained or if the person is on staff at a Mission Presbytery congregation or ministry.

- **Volunteer Information Form (Appendix A):** All persons seeking to work with minors must complete and sign a written information form to be supplied by Mission Presbytery. The form will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with children, church affiliation, reference and employment information, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. The information form will be maintained in confidence on file at Mission Presbytery.
- **Criminal Background Check:** A national criminal background check is required for all employees (regardless of position) and “workers” as defined above. Mission Presbytery will run a background check on all persons who serve on YCC or MPT unless documentation is provided demonstrating that a background check has already been completed by their congregation or governing body within the last two years. Before a background check is run by Mission Presbytery, prospective workers will be asked to sign an authorization form allowing Mission Presbytery to run the check. This form will provide personal and confidential information necessary to perform a criminal background check on each applicant, which will be completed by the designated Presbytery staff person. Individuals who decline to sign the authorization form or provide verification of a background check from a church will be unable to work with minors.
- **Personal Interview:** Before working with minors, a face-to-face interview may be scheduled with the applicant to discuss suitability for the position.
- **Reference Checks:** Before an applicant is permitted to work with minors within Mission Presbytery, at least one of the applicants’ references will be checked by Presbytery staff or YCC moderators. 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 in the past. Documentation of the reference checks will be maintained in confidence on file with Mission Presbytery.
- **Disqualifying Offense:** A disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with minors will be determined by adult members of Mission Presbytery’s Youth Connection Committee confidentially and on a case-by-case basis, in light of all the surrounding circumstances, including severity and period of time elapsed since the offense. Generally, convictions for an offense involving a minor

and/or for offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to our mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children. 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 Mission Presbytery.

Preventative Measures and Expectations:

- **Two Adult Rule:** It is our goal that a minimum of two unrelated adult workers will be present at all times when minors are being supervised during our programs and activities. Some youth classes and small groups may have only one adult worker in attendance during the class session; in these instances, doors to the classroom should remain open and there should be no fewer than three students with the adult worker. We do not allow minors to be alone with one adult during our events or in any sponsored activity. In the event that an adult needs to have a private conversation with a minor, the contact should take place in a public setting (such as the far end of a dining hall, or on the side of an activity area in view of others) and with the knowledge of another adult worker.
- **Open Door Policy:** Classroom and meeting space doors should remain open unless there is a window in the door or a side window beside it. Doors should never be locked while persons are inside the room.
- **Transportation:** A congregation's safeguarding policy is in effect during transportation to and during a YCC or Presbytery event. Mission Presbytery abides by the following guidelines when transporting minors and suggest that congregations do the same:
 - When adults are driving children and youth, all drivers shall abide by safe driving laws. Driving record history shall be obtained on all youth leaders and volunteers. Parents and guardians shall be informed of transportation plans, including who is driving.
 - Adults should avoid being in a vehicle with only one youth.
 - In the event that a one-on-one child/youth to adult scenario arises, e.g., unexpected transportation needs, parent permission shall be granted in writing, or by phone when necessary.

Responding to Allegations of Outside Child Abuse

- **Definition of Child Abuse:** For purposes of this policy, “child abuse” is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a minor’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 minor that is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.
 - **Emotional abuse** – emotional injury when the minor is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling and/or persistent teasing.
 - **Sexual abuse** – any sexual activity between a minor 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 essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

- **Knowledge of Outside Child Abuse:** Workers, small group leaders, and congregational sponsors may have the opportunity to become aware of child abuse that is occurring at home or elsewhere in a minor’s life. In the event that an adult worker becomes aware (during a Mission Presbytery event) of suspected abuse or neglect of a minor, this should be reported immediately to the Youth and Young Adult Advocate, YCC adult moderators, or event leadership for further action, including reporting to the host site and legal authorities as may be mandated by state law.

- All leaders working with minors at Presbytery sponsored events are encouraged to regularly review the incident reporting procedure and the requirements of state and local laws regarding the reporting of child abuse. (See Appendix B)

Responding to Allegations of Abuse During a Mission Presbytery Event

In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred during a Mission Presbytery event or sponsored programs, 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 suspended from their responsibilities with minors pending an investigation and instructed to remain away from Mission Presbytery youth events during the investigation. They should be instructed to have no contact with the victim or with witnesses.
3. All allegations of abuse should be reported to the civil authorities, and the organization will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse. Mission Presbytery will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities.
4. Mission Presbytery's insurance company will be notified, and the organization will complete an incident report. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company.
5. Mission Presbytery will designate a spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect. The advice of legal counsel will be sought before responding to media inquiries or releasing information about the situation to any party. All other representatives of the Presbytery should refrain from speaking to the media about the incident in question.
6. Pastoral care will be arranged for those who desire it. This should be for the purpose of providing pastoral support during the time of crisis and not for the purpose of investigating the incident or influencing the investigation.
7. If the investigation supports the accusations, the worker in question will be permanently removed from their position working with children or youth with Mission Presbytery.

Childcare During Presbytery Meetings

- **Screening and selection of childcare workers:** The screening and selection of childcare workers will be handled by the host church providing the childcare. Childcare provided at a presbytery meeting shall be in accordance with the Presbytery's guidelines in this policy. Ordinarily, the Presbytery will not allow a Presbytery event involving care of or activities for children and youth to be held at a church unless the host church has a child protection policy in place.
- **Supervision of childcare workers:** The host church providing childcare workers will be responsible for the supervision of workers.
- **Ratios:** The "two adult rule" will be standard procedure (see page 3 of this policy). There should be a minimum of 2 childcare workers for every 4 children being cared for.

- **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 younger children during programs or activities. The following guidelines apply to teenage workers:
 - Must be at least age 14.
 - Must be screened as specified above.
 - Must be under the supervision of an adult and must never be left alone with children.

- **Check-in/Check-out Procedures:** Children should be signed into and out of the child care room by a parent/guardian or a person authorized by the parent/guardian in writing. Host churches should have a check-in/check-out procedure. If the host church does not have a sign-in sheet they regularly use for their own child-care, they may use the one provided in Appendix C.

Health and Wellness Policies:

- **Medical Release Form:** Minors and adults participating in Mission Presbytery youth activities will have a completed and signed medical release form. (See Appendix D and E)

- **Medications Policy:** Mission Presbytery leadership is not responsible for the administration of prescription medication. Directions for prescription medications for minors should be clearly communicated to congregational youth sponsors. In the absence of congregational sponsors, youth are responsible for their own medication.

- **Accidental Injuries to Minors:** In the event that a minor is injured during a Mission Presbytery youth event or meeting, the following steps should be followed:
 - For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, workers will provide first aid (Band-Aids, etc.) as appropriate and will notify the minor's parent or guardian of the injury at the time the minor is picked up from our care.
 - For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple first aid, the parent and/or guardian will immediately be contacted in addition to the event leadership. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.

- Once the minor has received appropriate medical attention, an incident report will be completed in the case of injuries requiring treatment by a medical professional. (See Appendix F)

Discipline Policy

It is the policy of Mission Presbytery 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 or youth. Verbal abuse is also a prohibited form of punishment or discipline. Workers should consult with Mission Presbytery if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

Training

Mission Presbytery will provide training on this safeguarding policy to all new workers and volunteers 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.

Social Media Policy

When communicating with minors via digital messaging and social media, adult workers will make every effort to follow the social media and digital communication best practices as outlined in Appendix G.

Photo Release

Permission to post photos of minors is assumed unless the parent/guardian opts out in writing. Care is taken not to identify children by name, although parents and youth sometimes share, tag, or post identifying information themselves.



Appendix A | Mission Presbytery VOLUNTEER INFORMATION SHEET

Full Name of Volunteer _____

Date of Birth _____ Social Security Number _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Phone Number _____ Email _____

Current Church/Ministry of Membership _____

Years Active _____

Previous Church/Ministry _____

Years Active _____

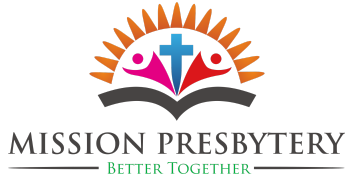
Experience with Children/Youth _____

Reference Name _____ How long known? _____

Phone Number _____ Email _____

I affirm that the above information is accurate and I authorize Mission Presbytery to use that information to run a background check and check references in accordance with Mission Presbytery's Child Protection Policy. I understand that this information will be kept securely at the Presbytery office.

Signed _____ Date _____



Appendix B | Indications of Abuse

What is an “abused, neglected, or dependent child”?

The definition of an abused, neglected, or dependent child is very broad.

Sexual abuse includes:

- Sexual indecency, sexual assault, or aggravated sexual assault.
- Failing to make a reasonable effort to prevent sexual conduct to a child.
- Using the child for the creation of obscene or pornographic material.

How can children be at risk in a “safe” place like church?

There may be several reasons children can be at risk even in safe places like a church.

The following factors may contribute to the risk in a church setting:

- Ready access to children
- Institutional surprise: “We’re good people”
- Many churches have historically failed to prosecute
- Fewer external barriers than other youth-serving organizations
- Challenges coordinating child protection strategies

Potential indicators of sexual abuse may include:

- Child does not want to go to a certain place or be around a particular person
- Child shows sexual knowledge or behavior beyond that expected for their age
- Child is overly affectionate and seems seductive with peers and adults
- Child has recurring genital infections or pain in the genital area
- Child has difficulty in walking or sitting
- Child has torn, stained, or bloody underclothing
- Child shows reluctance to change clothes
- Child is withdrawn, chronically depressed, or displays infantile behavior
- Child has exceptionally poor peer relationships
- Child is threatened by physical contact
- Child has unexplained money or “gifts”

For more information, please visit Prevent Child Abuse America at www.preventchildabuse.org



Appendix D | Mission Presbytery EVENT PARTICIPATION and MEDICAL RELEASE FORM (Minor)

Name of Participant _____ DOB: _____

Parent/Guardian _____ Phone (____) _____

Additional Emergency Contact _____

Relationship _____ Phone (____) _____

Current medications or medical conditions: _____

Allergies (food and/or medicine): _____

Dietary Restrictions: _____

Activity Restrictions: _____

Medical Insurance Co. _____ Policy # _____

As the parent/guardian of the above named youth, I hereby give my permission for my child to participate in all activities (minus restrictions listed above) with our church youth group attending (event) _____ on (date) _____ at (location) _____.

I also give permission to the adult leaders of the Youth Connection Committee and to the designated chaperones or sponsors from our home church to administer the community covenant and all appropriate rules of conduct that will apply to my child. I understand that if my child's behavior is disruptive to the event, they will be sent home at my expense.

In the event of an emergency during the said event, I hereby authorize the designated chaperones/sponsors from our home church or YCC leadership to consent to and arrange

for emergency medical treatment in the event, after reasonable efforts are made to obtain my consent, that I cannot be reached.

I hereby release Mission Presbytery and its staff, event leaders, our sponsoring church, the designated chaperones/sponsors, and the host site for this event from any responsibility and liability for any injury or illness that my child may sustain during this event.

I give permission for my child's image and likeness from this event to be used on Mission Presbytery social media, newsletter, and website in promotional and information materials.

I declare that all the information stated above is correct and complete to the best of my knowledge.

Signature of Parent or Guardian of Minor Participant:

_____ **Date** _____



Appendix E | Mission Presbytery EVENT PARTICIPATION and MEDICAL RELEASE FORM (Adult)

Name of Participant _____ DOB: _____

Emergency Contact _____

Relationship _____ Phone (____) _____

Current medications or medical conditions: _____

Allergies (food and/or medicine): _____

Dietary Restrictions: _____

Activity Restrictions: _____

Medical Insurance Co. _____ Policy # _____

I will be attending

(event) _____ on (date) _____ at (location)

_____.

I agree to abide by the community covenant and all appropriate rules of conduct.

I hereby release Mission Presbytery and its staff, my sponsoring church, the designated leaders, and the host site for this event from any responsibility and liability for any injury or illness that I may sustain during this event.

I give permission for my image and likeness from this event to be used on Mission Presbytery social media, newsletter, and website in promotional and information materials.

I declare that all the information stated above is correct and complete to the best of my knowledge.

Signature of Participant:

_____ **Date** _____



MISSION PRESBYTERY
BETTER TOGETHER

Appendix F | Incident Report Form

Date of Incident: _____

Name and address of person(s) involved:

Involved party's phone: (_____) _____ (_____) _____

Where did the incident occur (Be specific to inside or outside of church, which rooms, etc.):

What type of incident (Circle One):

Physical

Emotional

Property Damage

Sexual

Describe incident in detail, providing dates, times, and surrounding events:

Witnesses to incident and phone numbers:

Remarks by the involved party:

Name of Person Reporting

Position

Date



Appendix G | Best Practices for Online Communication

Engaging with youth using digital messaging and social media* can be a healthy way to cultivate positive relationships and maintain communications using the tools that youth are using. Yet social media is a rapidly changing communication tool, and the risk of inappropriate sharing or the blurring of appropriate boundaries between minors and adults is ever-present.

Mission Presbytery takes care to protect the safety and privacy of youth in digital communication by recommending the following best practices:

- Use good sense in all communications. Think twice before saying or sharing anything via social media or digital communications. Could this comment be misconstrued? Would you be comfortable if it were shared or read by others?
- Online communications with minors should be with the knowledge and approval of parents/guardians.
- Avoid platforms that automatically delete content (like SnapChat).
- A youth might openly share thoughts and feelings online, but take great care when responding. Be a good listener, but be careful in expressing your own feelings via digital communication. A good rule of thumb is to limit what you share to factual information.
- Mission Presbytery pledges not to share any potentially sensitive or compromising photographs or information about minors on social media or in digital communications.
- We recognize that social media is a rapidly shifting technology, and we resolve to pay close attention to its development and advise volunteers and staff on its use accordingly.

*Social media refers to any digital communication, including email, texting, digital messaging, and connections through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, SnapChat, and any other online or mobile application-based platform.