

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

PRESBYTERY OF WINNEBAGO

Approved September 15, 2009

I. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND POLICY

The Presbytery of Winnebago believes it is called by God to provide and maintain a safe, nurturing environment for all children, youth under the age of 18, and vulnerable adults while in its care during any Presbytery sponsored or cosponsored event. A commitment to this call includes preventing the following types of inappropriate conduct:

- Physical Abuse, including any unwanted touch, any physical contact intended to coerce or do harm, any hitting or touching in anger.
- Emotional/Verbal Abuse, including insults, name calling, belittling remarks, unfavorable comparisons with other children or youth, shaming, deliberately causing fear, or using speech to hurt.
- Leadership Abuse, including using scripture, church authority or one's position of power to coerce, control, harm or shame.
- Sexual Abuse, which is defined as any abuse against a child that is sexual in nature. The behavior may or may not involve touching. Sexual contact or interaction between an adult and a child is always considered forced and abusive whether or not consented to by the child.

For the protection of our children, *all persons under the supervision of the presbytery* who are working directly with children, youth and vulnerable adults, whether paid or volunteer, at any Presbytery of Winnebago sponsored or cosponsored events are subject to the provisions of this policy. Therefore, all such persons are required to:

- receive presbytery training materials to increase their sensitivity to the prevention of any form of abuse to and protection of children, youth, and vulnerable adults
- complete volunteer/employment applications including consent to background screening
- sign the presbytery's "Covenant for Leaders"

II. SELECTING AND SCREENING VOLUNTEERS AND STAFF

It is the policy of the Presbytery of Winnebago that all leaders working with or supervising minors during any presbytery-sponsored or co-sponsored activities and programs must satisfactorily complete an application form and criminal background check.

Adult Volunteers and Staff (at least 21 years of age)

Procedures:

- A cover letter, application form, background check authorization, and a copy of the Covenant for Leaders will be provided to all potential staff and volunteers by the presbytery staff person responsible for administration of the program.
- Forms must be completed and returned by the deadline set by the Planning Team or committee responsible for the program or event at which the applicant seeks to serve.
- All forms will be reviewed by the presbytery staff member assigned to the event and at least one other person (usually a member of the Planning Team or committee responsible for the event). The reviewers, using the information at their disposal, will decide whether or not the applicant will be approved.
- Persons not approved will be so notified in writing.
- Completed forms and related confidential information will be kept in confidential files in the Presbytery office.
- Approval will apply for the calendar year in which it was made, and for the next two calendar years. After that period, the applicant must reapply.
- No person shall be exempt from these procedures.

Young Adult Volunteers (ages 18-20)

- Young adult volunteers must be at least age 18
- Young adult volunteers will be screened as specified above.
- Young adult volunteers must be under the supervision of an Adult Volunteer

At all times, the Presbytery of Winnebago reserves the right to determine who shall serve.

III. TRAINING

The presbytery will provide training materials on the importance of protecting children and youth from abuse and the specific provisions of the presbytery's policy. Training will include but is not limited to receiving the presbytery's policies and forms related to child protection and receiving and watching the appropriate training video.

Additional training may be required for specific events. The presbytery reserves the right to require additional training for both volunteers and employees.

IV. SUPERVISION OF VOLUNTEERS AND STAFF

In addition to careful screening procedures and training for all children/youth workers, the presbytery will provide for supervision of all persons with responsibility for children and/or youth at presbytery sponsored or cosponsored events and activities. This is for the protection not only of the children and youth in our care, but also for the persons working with them. This supervision will take the following forms:

Designation of a "Supervisor"

At each event during which there are programs or activities for children or youth, the presbytery will recruit and/or designate an adult to supervise the children and youth activities and leadership. Ordinarily this person will be the one to whom reports of alleged abuse will be made and who will initiate the official reporting process. It is the responsibility of this supervisor to be familiar with the details of the program design and plans and to know what is happening within classes, workshops, or other groupings of children and/or youth.

Two Adult Rule

There should be at least two adults working with each group of children or youth. In those cases when older youth are part of the care-giving team for children, an adult must always be present with the group. Insofar as possible, no one should be left alone, one on one, with a child or youth. The only exception to this two-adult policy would be in a situation in which the contact occurs in a public place and other persons are in and out of the areas where the adult is working with children or youth. The presbytery is committed to providing adequate personnel for all events so that this rule may be maintained.

Parental Permission

The presbytery will seek parental permission for children and youth to participate in any presbytery sponsored or cosponsored event during which the children or youth will be under the care of someone other than the parents.

V. DIGITAL COMMUNICATION

It is recommended that digital communication between adults and minors be limited to communication that:

- pertains to events sponsored by the presbytery
- can be archived (such as email or chat session saved to an online account) or public (such as a social networking site where information can be viewed by more than one party)

VI. TRANSPORTATION

Transportation to and from presbytery sponsored events is the responsibilities of the families. No minors will be transported by presbytery staff or volunteers during the course of an event except in case of emergency.

VII. REPORTING ALLEGATIONS AND INCIDENTS

Anyone who has knowledge or suspicion that inappropriate conduct has occurred should report it immediately to the Supervisor of the Children or Youth Program or the Event Staff person. When an individual reports an incident or allegation, that person should refrain from engaging in questioning the alleged victim so that the appropriate investigative procedures may be followed.

Preliminary Steps

The person observing and reporting an incident of alleged inappropriate conduct should first:

1. Secure the safety of the child/youth. This may include an immediate call to emergency services as deemed necessary.
2. Secure the safety of others and stabilize the environment in which the incident occurred. Under no circumstances should a reporter who has responsibility for a group of children or youth leave them unsupervised in order to report an incident. Seek help from other caregivers who are close at hand.

Internal Reporting

The following procedure should be used to report the incident to the appropriate supervisors or staff at the event:

1. Reporter reports orally to his/her immediate supervisor, the alleged offender's supervisor, or to the Event Staff if the supervisor is less accessible at the time of the incident or the time of

reporting. If the reporter is an event participant and not someone providing leadership, it is appropriate to report directly to the Event Staff. Event Staff is the member of the presbytery staff or the presbytery delegated volunteer assigned to and onsite at the event.

2. Supervisor reports the allegation/incident to the Event Staff.

3. Event Staff:

a. investigates the facts of the incident/allegation.

b. prepares the official Incident Report Form.

c. initiates the response to the allegation and incident.

d. reports to presbytery office and/or presbytery attorney regarding insurance or legal implications, if deemed necessary.

e. contacts parents or responsible adults as soon as feasible.

Reporting to Child Protection or Other Civil Authorities

The specific definition of a “mandatory reporter” varies from state to state according to its relevant law. Ordinarily, these definitions could be extended to include those who have responsibility for the care of children and youth. The presbytery recognizes that it has a moral, if not legal, obligation to exercise the care evidenced in Christ’s invitation to the little children to “come to him.” Therefore, when the investigation of an incident or allegation confirms that the incident or allegation is consistent with what would require reporting to civil authorities, the event staff will do so. If the incident is such that it poses an immediate or imminent threat to the safety of the child or youth, any person witnessing the incident may report it to the appropriate authorities. All incidents so reported should also be reported to the supervisor and/or event staff as soon as possible. Training for all children and youth leaders will include appropriate procedures for reporting and how to contact appropriate civil authorities if it should become necessary.

Record Maintenance

A confidential record will be kept on file in the presbytery office that a report of suspected abuse or neglect was made. This notation will include the name of the event or activity and the staff person to whom the report was made, the date and time that the report was made, and the names of the persons making that report. Nothing confidential will be included in this notation.

VIII. RESPONSE TO ALLEGATIONS AND INCIDENTS

The presbytery recognizes that we have an obligation to respond to a number of individuals and audiences, depending on the facts of the particular allegation/incident. The presbytery also affirms that any response decision is at the sole discretion of the event staff person in consultation with the committee responsible for the event and in the best interest of the event. A determination of an unfounded accusation may nonetheless result in a leader being asked to relinquish their leadership responsibility and/or to leave the event if such separation is deemed in the best interests of the event and its participants.

The following guidelines shall apply as the Event Staff and committee or Planning Team determines the appropriate response:

To victim(s):

1. Determine need for and provide appropriate care for and follow up on immediate needs of the victim(s).

To the accused:

1. Remove the accused from leadership, at least temporarily, until the investigation of facts is completed.
2. Report of an allegation is not a presumption of guilt and, therefore, appropriate care will be exercised to provide the accused with an opportunity to be heard.
3. The supervisor of the event shall determine the next steps regarding the accused's further participation in and presence at the event.
4. The committee responsible for the event may recommend pursuance of any further disciplinary action needed (e.g. calling the police, Child Protection Agency, Presbytery Sexual Misconduct Response Team, or the accused's governing body of jurisdiction.)

To parents or responsible adults:

1. Share the facts of the incident, the committee's actions, and provide care and follow up as appropriate.

To the Event:

1. Event staff or committee/planning team member reports the facts of the incident to a plenary of event participants as necessary and appropriate, exercising appropriate pastoral care for the victim, the accused, and the other event participants.