

# **CHILD PROTECTION POLICY**

## **Presbytery of Winnebago**

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Presbytery of Winnebago

# CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

## 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. (Leadership is defined on page 3, paragraph 1 for purposes of this policy.)

Sexual Abuse, which is defined as any sexual contact with children, youth, or vulnerable adults in a leader's charge, including:

- fondling private parts
- oral, genital, or anal penetration
- sexual intercourse
- forcible rape
- suggestive sexual comments
- showing pornography (sexually explicit materials)
- exposing sex organs
- allowing children to witness sexual activity

For the protection of our children, all persons 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 participate in pre-event training and orientation including but not limited to training to increase their sensitivity to the prevention of any form of abuse to and protection of children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

## II. SELECTING AND SCREENING VOLUNTEERS AND STAFF

It is the policy of the Presbytery of Winnebago that all adults and youth (middle high and senior high leadership must be at least 21 years of age) working with or supervising minors during any presbytery-sponsored or co-sponsored activities and programs must satisfactorily complete an application form and police background check authorization. The purpose of this policy is to provide a safe and secure environment for the children and youth who participate in our activities and programs. It is also the policy of the Presbytery that at least one member of a team working with children or youth must be an active member of a congregation within the bounds of the Presbytery of Winnebago.

### Procedures:

- A cover letter, application form, police background check authorization, and a copy of the Covenant for Leaders of Children and Youth 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 member of the Planning Team or committee responsible for the event or its designee. The review will include:
  - Checking form for completeness.
  - Reviewing answers to questions.
  - Checking references.
  - Securing additional information as reviewers deem necessary.
  - Securing appropriate police background check.
- The reviewers, using the information at their disposal, will decide whether or not the applicant will be approved. Their decision must be unanimous.
- 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.
- At all times, the Presbytery of Winnebago reserves the right to determine who shall serve.

### III. TRAINING

The presbytery will provide training on the importance of protecting children and youth from abuse and the specific provisions of the presbytery's policy. All persons working with and/or responsible for children and/or youth at Presbytery sponsored or cosponsored events and activities will be required to participate in this training. This training will be provided after recruitment and prior to the beginning of one's time of service. The Presbytery will make every effort to provide this training at a time and location which will allow those who are required to be trained to participate in an appropriate training event. In some instances this may mean providing more than one training event; however, it is the Presbytery's responsibility to provide reasonable opportunities for this training. No person who refuses or is otherwise unable to participate in planned training events will be allowed to be responsible for children or youth at a Presbytery sponsored or cosponsored event or activity.

Training will include the following components. Specific events and activities, by virtue of their unique qualities, may require additional components.

1. Scriptural basis for child advocacy, e.g.

Deut. 30:19, choose life

Prov. 13:24, those who spare the rod . . .

Mal 4:6, turning hearts of parents to their children

Mark 9:36-37, welcoming the children

Mark 10:13-16, Jesus blessing the children

Luke 17:1-3, forgiveness? The dilemma

Cor 3:16-17, our bodies are God's holy temple; called to be advocates for the victims.

2. Importance of the issue for the church

3. The specific components of the Presbytery's Child Protection Policy

4. Review of specific safety procedures relevant for the event or activity

5. Concluding litany of affirmation or covenant for leaders

## 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. While the specific title of this position may vary from event to event, this person will have overall responsibility of the program and for the persons providing leadership. The person may or may not have responsibility for recruitment of leadership, but will be responsible for their performance of tasks and behavior during the event in relationship to their work with children and youth. 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. When there is more than one person assigned supervisory responsibility for a program, specific assignments will be made for each person so that both the individual and the leaders/teachers will be clear about to whom and for whom they are responsible.
- 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. This will be emphasized during the training of all leaders for children’s and youth programs. This rule is intended to protect children and to protect the leaders from false accusation. The Presbytery is committed to providing adequate personnel for all events so that this rule may be maintained.
- Open-Door Policy** The “open-door policy” requires doors to be open at all times or rooms or doors to have unobstructed windows.
- 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. The permission forms will indicate the specific nature of the event or program, the type of adult leadership which will be provided, sleeping arrangements, and any release from liability which may be requested. The Presbytery will also request insurance information and parental permission to seek medical treatment for each child or youth participating in the case of a medical emergency. (*See Appendix I for Presbytery Permission Form.*)

**Training**

All volunteers who work with children or youth will be trained in understanding the nature of child abuse and its effects on the lives of children, in recognizing signs of possible abuse, and in the reporting requirements of the state in which the activity or event occurs.

**Suspicious Behavior**

Supervisors and all persons providing leadership for programs for children and youth will be asked to be alert to and report any suspicious behavior which might suggest inappropriate conduct or relationships between an adult and a child or youth or between older and younger youth at the event. Such behavior should be dealt with immediately, either by commenting to the offending adult (in the case of a minor boundary violation deemed to be caused by ignorance) or reporting to the Supervisor or Event Staff. All such reports will be seriously considered, prompt warnings will be issued as appropriate, and situations carefully monitored.

## V. 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. It is especially incumbent upon those in leadership positions within the children and youth program to be particularly sensitive and alert to warning signs of abuse and potential incidents. 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 on-site 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 (See Appendix G).
  - 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**

The specific definition of a "mandatory reporter" varies from state to state according to its relevant law. Ordinarily, these definitions

**Civil Authorities**

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.

## VI. 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 determine the appropriate response:

- |                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| To victim(s):                     | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Determine need for and provide appropriate care for and follow up on immediate needs of the victim(s).</li></ol>  |
| To the accused:                   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Remove the accused from leadership, at least temporarily, until the investigation of facts is completed.</li><li>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.</li><li>3. The Committee responsible for the event should meet to determine the next steps regarding the accused's further participation in and presence at the event.</li><li>4. The Committee 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.)</li></ol> |
| To parents or responsible adults: | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Share the facts of the incident, the committee's actions, and provide care and follow up as appropriate.</li></ol>  |
| To the Event:                     | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>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.</li></ol>  |