

SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY

PROTECTION POLICY AND PROCEDURES FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH & VULNERABLE ADULTS

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Webster Groves Presbyterian Church

Protection Policy and Procedures for Children, Youth & Vulnerable Adults

As a community of faith called to live Christ's love, welcome all people, and joyfully serve God, we believe that we must do all we can to protect the children who worship, learn, and grow here as well as protect the adults who generously share their faithful gifts with the children. It is because of these beliefs that we establish the following policies and procedures for all working with and ministering to the children, youth and vulnerable persons of Webster Groves Presbyterian Church (WGPC), including those served in the Early Childhood Center (ECC) of WGPC.

In addition to the requirements set forth in this policy, the church's Early Childhood Center shall also adhere to relevant requirements established by the State of Missouri. Where the two requirements are in conflict, the more conservative approach should be taken.

Because offenders often violate policies to gain access to children/youth and vulnerable adults, when those in a position of authority know and understand policies, they can identify, interrupt, and report policy violations. Simply interrupting a policy violation can prevent a false allegation of abuse or put an offender on notice that no one works in private, the rules apply to everyone, and violations will be detected. As such, as faithful leaders we commit to a full understanding and implementation of these policies, so that all might be protected and cared for in our church.

Definitions

Child Abuse — any physical injury, sexual abuse, or emotional abuse inflicted on a child other than by accidental means by those responsible for the child's care, custody, and control in accordance with Missouri state law. (see, **Section 210.110, RSMo.; 13 CSR 35-31.010**)

Minor, Children, Youth — Anyone under the age of 18

Neglect — failure or inattention on the part of those responsible for the care custody and control of the child to provide the proper or necessary support, education as required by law, nutrition or medical, surgical, or any other care necessary for the child's well-being.

Oversight Committee — those in leadership at WGPC who are responsible for this policy and for receiving reports reference in said policy. Members are the Head of Staff, Associate Pastor, the Director of Youth and Family or member of Faith Formation Committee, Personnel Commission and the Business Administrator.

Staff — Any individual paid by the church

Volunteer — Any individual not paid by the church but with leadership responsibilities

Scope

This policy shall apply to all activities sponsored by Webster Groves Presbyterian Church regardless of location. "Sponsored events" are herein defined to include any event where the church commits resources to the event, including promotional resources except where it is clearly established that the event is sponsored by an outside group.

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Training, Screening, and Selection of Staff and Volunteers

1. All documentation collected in association with the application process shall be maintained in a permanent secure file accessible to the Pastor and others determined by the Personnel Commission of the Session.
2. All volunteers, staff members, or any person working in a church-sponsored ministry with access to children or youth, including the ECC, shall meet the following requirements prior to beginning to work with children and youth. For those individuals currently working with children and youth, the following requirements must be met within 90 days of the adoption of this policy:
 - a. Complete an application and interview process as determined by the Personnel Commission of the Session. The application process will include a procedure in which employees and volunteers are asked if they have ever been accused of, participated in, or been convicted of sexual misconduct.
 - b. All volunteers and paid staff working with minors or vulnerable adults shall complete *Safe Sanctuary* training offered by the church prior to serving and to be renewed every three years.
 - c. Agree to submit to a background check. Background checks shall include, at minimum:
 - i. Social Security trace
 - ii. State of Missouri criminal check
 - iii. Family Care Safety Registry of Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services
 - iv. National (Multi-Jurisdictional) criminal check
 - v. National sex offender registry check if not included as part of another check
 - vi. Background checks shall be valid for not more than 3 years from the date on which the check is completed for volunteers, and one (1) year for paid staff.
 - d. Submit two (2) personal references. The person conducting this interview will contact the references provided on the application form and any additional persons as the circumstances dictate. A written record of such contacts will be retained with the application form.
 - e. Sign a statement that they have read, understood, and agree to abide by this Child and Youth Protection (Safe Sanctuary) Policy. (Application and Covenantal Agreement for Adults)
 - f. Volunteers under the age of 18 are not required to complete a background check, but must receive written permission from a parent or guardian prior to serving (Application and Covenantal Agreement for Minors) and must participate in an age appropriate Child Protection Policy training.
3. Anyone with a prior conviction of any form of child abuse or sexual misconduct will not be eligible to work with children or youth in any capacity. In cases where there are other convictions or concerns for the safety and welfare of the children/youth based on the screening process, the authorized church staff will have discretion to reject the individual's application.

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4. If any WGPC staff person becomes aware of a prior child abuse conviction or other at-risk behaviors, which was not discovered or disclosed by the background checks, and which in his/her opinion might endanger the well-being of children or youth in that person's care, he/she will notify two (2) members of the **Oversight Committee**, which includes the following: Head of Staff, Associate Pastor, the Director of Youth and Family or member of Faith Formation, Personnel Commission and the Business Administrator.
5. Recertification must be repeated every 3 years in order for the candidate to continue working with children or youth. Individuals pursuing recertification must participate in the required training and re-submit for a background check.

Supervision of Child, Youth & Vulnerable Adults

Different settings can call for different protection requirements depending on the circumstances. Those in charge of the supervision and service being provided should be mindful of both Requirements and Guidelines, in addition to applying their own wisdom to the needs of a given occasion.

1. At all times where a group of minors is present there should be two or more screened adults. For purposes of this policy, a married couple or adults that are cohabitating may serve together but shall count as one adult.
 - a. Volunteers and paid staff leading groups of minors:
 - i. Should be at least eighteen (18) years old.
 - ii. The Personnel Commission or the Oversight Committee may waive this requirement only in the case of paid staff whose position requires them to regularly lead students less than five (5) years younger provided that they must be at least three (3) years older.
 - b. Volunteers and paid staff shall be responsible for no more than ten (10) minors or vulnerable adults at any given time regardless of age.
 - c. Volunteers and paid staff should be responsible for no more than three (3) minors under the age of 3 years or five (5) minors under the age of seven (7) years.
2. Counseling of Youth and Children: In General, WGPC does not engage in counseling activities, however, this is not meant to govern a licensed professional counselor in a paid counseling relationship with a child or youth.
3. Programming for children and youth should be conducted in rooms with open doors or with windows giving clear visibility to the entire room, and a random drop-in from other staff and/or volunteers.
4. A one-on-one interaction between staff/volunteers and a child/youth/vulnerable person would be rare. If such a situation should occur, staff and volunteers should advise others of the interaction.
5. The physical contact policy of Webster Groves Presbyterian Church promotes a positive, nurturing environment while protecting consumers, employees and volunteers. Our organization encourages appropriate physical contact with consumers and prohibits inappropriate displays of physical contact.

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Any inappropriate physical contact by employees or volunteers towards consumers in the organization’s programs will result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment. The organization’s policies and guidance for appropriate and inappropriate physical interactions include but are not limited to:

Safe Touch Policy:

SAFE TOUCH	BAD TOUCH
Contact initiated by the consumer such as:	• Full-frontal hugs
• Side hugs	• Kisses
• Shoulder-to-shoulder or “temple” hugs	• Showing affection in isolated areas or while one-on one
• Pats on the shoulder or back	• Lap sitting
• Handshakes	• Piggyback rides, wrestling
• High-fives and hand slapping	• Tickling
• Pats on the head when culturally appropriate	• Allowing a consumer to cling to an employee’s or volunteer’s leg
• Touching hands, shoulders, and arms	• Allowing consumers, older than kindergarten, to sit on an employee or volunteer’s lap
• Arms around shoulders	• Any type of massage given by or to a consumer outside of accepted and documented medical treatment
• Holding hands (with young children in escorting situations)	• Any form of affection that is unwanted by the consumer or the employee or volunteer
	• Touching bottom, chest, or genital areas that is outside authorized and documented personal care assistance

6. Bathroom Policies

- a. Most incidents of abuse between children and youth occur in the bathrooms.

Therefore, the following guidelines should be followed:

- i. When supervising restroom use, screened adults should first quickly scan the bathroom before allowing children to enter.
- ii. Screened adult to take groups of two or more children/youth to the bathroom – following the “rule of three” or more.
- iii. Minimize children/youth of different ages using the bathroom at the same time.
- iv. Screened adults should stand outside the bathroom door but remain within earshot
- v. If assisting young children in the stalls, the screened adult should keep the door to the stall open.
- vi. Staff should not use the bathroom at the same time as children/youth.

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7. Check In
 - a. Infants through third graders must be checked in by the adult who brought the child, to church-sponsored ministries that minister strictly to children.
 - b. The same person who checks a child into church-sponsored ministries must check him/her out, with the exception granted for spouses or in the case that the person possesses a signed note or previous arrangements were made by the parents or the person who did the initial check-in.
 - c. Check in for the ECC shall follow these guidelines.
8. Gift Giving

Potential abusers routinely groom children/youth by giving gifts, thereby endearing themselves to children/ youth.

 - a. No secrets will be kept from parents/guardians.
 - b. Cards and thank you gifts will only be given with the knowledge of the public and with parental knowledge.

Transportation

Transporting children and youth is an important concern. Their safety can be at risk in a variety of ways.

1. Drivers will follow applicable laws.
2. Drivers must be either the child's/youth's parent/guardian, or a screened adult or a paid staff person who is at least 18 years old and trained on this Protection Policy.
3. A copy of the driver's license should be on file at the church.
4. Drivers should not text message while driving.
5. In order to be listed on the "approved driver list" of drivers, a Motor Vehicle Record search must be conducted and determined the record is satisfactory.

Off-Site Contact

Staff and volunteers may sometimes have off-site contacts due to situations such as mentoring programs, babysitting, or sharing a meal. These outings should be approved by WGPC.

When outside contact is necessary, ensure that the following steps are followed:

1. Ensure that staff or volunteers have the parents'/guardians' permission to engage in outside contact with the individual(s). Consider requiring the parents/guardians to sign a release-of-liability statement.
2. Advise church staff or volunteer leadership that outside contact will occur and identify what types of contact is appropriate and inappropriate.

Trip and Retreat Supervision

Trip and Retreat settings can call for different child/youth protection requirements depending on the circumstances. Trips and Retreats must be approved by the WGPC Oversight Committee.

1. At least two screened adults will be present for all trips, retreats and other events where the children and/or youth gather overnight at, or away from, the church campus.

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3. There will be at least one screened adult for each gender present at co-ed overnight events. At single gender overnight events, at least one of the two screened adults present shall be of the same gender as the child/youth.
4. The person in charge of youth/children for each overnight trip and/or retreat shall carry parental permission slips including permission for emergency medical care.

In a hotel-type setting, rooms should be assigned as follows:

1. Separate rooms for adults and child/youth should be assigned with at least two children or youth per room.
2. Adults should make random monitoring hall trips and room checks at night by two adults of the same gender as those being checked.
3. A hotel should be selected where the rooms open to the interior of the building (i.e., do not open to the outside).

Outside Groups

1. Groups that use WGPC space or require lodging within the church but are not in ministry with the church must present their own Child and Youth Protection policy. If they cannot provide their own policy they are subject to the policy of WGPC as stated in this document.
2. Outside groups providing programming for Webster Groves Presbyterian Church children or youth on an ongoing basis must complete WGPC's required Child Protection Policy training.

Electronic Communication

Being mindful that developing personal relationships with minors is critical to their spiritual formation, volunteers and staff are not prohibited from interacting with minors on social media.

1. The staff and volunteers working with children and youth should rarely **initiate** a connection (friending, following, etc.) on social media and will advise the parents/guardian and other staff/volunteers of such an interaction.
2. If a student initiates a connection, the student's parent or guardian as well as the volunteer or staff member's supervisor shall be notified.
3. All electronic communications shall be documented and retained
4. Prohibited social media conduct includes:
 - a. Comments that are, or could be construed by any observer, to be harsh, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating.
 - b. Sexually oriented conversations or discussions about sexual activities.
 - c. Private messages between employees and volunteers and children or youth.
 - d. Posting inappropriate pictures (for example, sexually suggestive, exploitive, or voyeuristic) or inappropriate comments on pictures.
5. Parents will be encouraged to play a role in monitoring their children's and youth interactions with employees and volunteers.

Basic Procedures for Responding and Reporting to Abuse or Allegations of Abuse

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Because Webster Groves Presbyterian Church is dedicated to maintaining zero tolerance for abuse, it is imperative that every volunteer, staff member or any person working in a church-sponsored ministry actively participates in the protection of children and youth.

As required by mandated reporting laws, staff and volunteers must report any suspected abuse or neglect of a minor—whether on or off organization property or whether perpetrated by staff, volunteers, or others—to the Children’s Division of the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services. Reports may be made confidentially or anonymously. A person who mistakenly reports suspected abuse is immune from civil or criminal liability as long as the report was made in good faith and without malice.

What to do if a minor discloses abuse, you discover or suspect abuse

1. If you witness abuse, interrupt the behavior immediately.
 - a. If abuse is disclosed to you, assure the individual disclosing that he or she was correct to tell you and that you believe them.
 - b. Do not interrogate the minor. Simply listen to what they are willing to share.
 - c. DO NOT question the minor. Professionals will gather any additional information needed from the minor. Questioning the child can cause additional trauma.
2. Protect the alleged victim from intimidation, retribution, or further abuse.
3. Immediately report the allegation or incident to the Missouri Children’s Division Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline- Missouri Child Abuse & Neglect Hotline 1-800-392-3738.
4. Notify a member of the Oversight Committee immediately after you have contacted Children’s Division.
5. Document the incident, disclosure, or any circumstances causing your suspicion of abuse, using factual statements only.

It is not your job to investigate the incident but it **IS** your job to report the incident to the Missouri Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline and a member of the Oversight Committee in a timely manner. Check back to make sure appropriate steps were taken. If not, report again to the Missouri Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline and the Oversight Committee.

1. The Oversight Committee will take the following steps when notified of abuse of a minor:
 - a. First, determine if the minor is still in danger and if so, take immediate steps to prevent any further harm.
 - b. Gather as much information about the allegation as you can from the person to whom the disclosure was made or who observed the abuse. For example, who made the report, who was allegedly abused, who was the alleged abuser, what was the nature of the alleged abuse, where and when did the alleged abuse occur, etc. DO NOT question the minor. Professionals will gather any additional information needed from the minor. Questioning the child can cause additional trauma.
 - c. Accurately record everything you learn in as much detail as you can.
 - d. Remember your notes may be read by others. Stick to the facts.

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- e. If the person who reported the suspected abuse to you has not call the child abuse and neglect hotline, ask them to make the call. You can be present and supportive while the call is made. If it is an emergency, call 911.
- f. Obtain a case number and the name and contact information of the person with whom you or the reporter speak to at Children’s Division or Law Enforcement.
- g. If the alleged abuse involves a staff member or volunteer, notify the Oversight Committee and follow your crisis management plan.
- h. Suspend the accused staff or volunteer until the investigation is completed

Reporting Inability to Follow Child Protection Policy

In the event that it is not possible for volunteers, staff members, or any person working in a church-sponsored ministry to follow the policy due to the ministry or safety needs of the children and/or youth, the individual will notify the Oversight Committee by documenting the reason the policy could not be followed. If there were any occurrences (actual or perceived) that could infringe on the safety of the children and/or youth or the responsible youth or adult during the time they were with the children and/or youth this must be included in the documentation. This documentation should be given to the Oversight Committee within 24 hours of the occurrence. Volunteers, staff members, or any person working in a church-sponsored ministry will make every attempt to adhere to this policy as written above.

Acknowledgement of Receipt and Understanding

I, the undersigned, acknowledge receipt and understanding of Webster Groves Presbyterian Church (WGPC) Child Protection Policy. I am a paid staff person/volunteer at WGPC and agree to abide by the policies and statements contained herein. I have not been accused of, participated in, or been convicted of sexual misconduct.

Signature

Name printed

Date:

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Policy Summary

Webster Groves Presbyterian Church WILL NOT TOLERATE the mistreatment or abuse of one child/youth by another child/youth nor by an adult. All staff and volunteers of Webster Groves Presbyterian Church are mandated reporters and are responsible for the safety and welfare of children and vulnerable persons. Staff and volunteers are DISCOURAGED from working one-on-one with children and youth in a private setting. If a situation where working one-on-one with children and youth is necessary, all attempts to advise others before the interaction and to maintain protective steps as described in this policy should be maintained.

Children and youth WILL:

- Be treated with respect at all times.
- Be treated fairly regardless of race, sex, sexual orientation, gender identification, age, or religion.

Staff and volunteers WILL:

- Submit a standard application, a signed Code of Conduct, at least two (2) personal references, and a signed Background Screening Information Request Form. The screening is repeated every three years for volunteers, and one year for paid staff.
- Complete the required online training/registration, and participate in a face-to-face interview. The training is repeated annually.
- Adhere to uniform standards of appropriate and inappropriate **Verbal Interactions** as outlined by Webster Groves Presbyterian Church.
- Adhere to uniform standards of appropriate and inappropriate **Physical Interactions** as indicated in the attached table on pg. 3 of this document.
- Avoid affection with children and youth that cannot be observed by others.
- Use common areas when working with individual children and youth (i.e. meeting in rooms with windows where others can see in, cracked/open door policy, video surveillance, time constraints, etc.).
- Report suspected child abuse or neglect to the Webster Groves Presbyterian Church Oversight Committee, which includes the following: Head of Staff, Associate Pastor, the Director of Youth and Family or a member of Faith Formation, Personnel Commission and the Business Administrator; and to the appropriate authorities as required by state mandated reporter laws.
- Follow check in/check out procedures for children, youth and vulnerable populations.

Staff and volunteers WILL NOT:

- Abuse children and youth in any way including (but not limited to) the following:
 - Physical abuse** - hitting, spanking, shaking, slapping, unnecessary restraints
 - Verbal abuse** - degrading, threatening, cursing
 - Sexual abuse** - inappropriate touching, exposing oneself, sexually oriented conversations
 - Mental abuse** - shaming, humiliation, cruelty
 - Neglect** - withholding food, water, shelter
 - Bullying** – Physical, verbal, nonverbal, relational, cyberbullying, hazing, sexualized bullying
- Have criminal convictions that are violent or sexual in nature.
- Stare at or comment on children or youth's bodies.

