

Guiding Principles

What protects our children and youth also serves to protect our church from unfounded charges and legal liability. In no way will we allow these policies to interfere with our service of Christ; rather, they will enhance our Christian service. We are motivated because we are entrusted with the spiritual, educational and moral development of our children and youth. We are dedicated to providing an environment that nurtures the dignity and safety of each person and where healthy and appropriate relationships between all individuals are encouraged and expected.

Child abuse and sexual misconduct can tear the fabric of relationships within the church. These acts are reprehensible and an affront to our Heavenly Father, and the mission of the church cannot be achieved when such hurt is inflicted. It is prudent to prevent such injuries and occurrences and to have a clear plan of action and response should an allegation be made. Abuse of any kind is not to be tolerated.

The Lord gives us guidance in Scripture:

“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’” Genesis 1:26-27

“Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him; for God’s temple is sacred, and you are that temple.” 1 Corinthians 3:16-17

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own.” 1 Corinthians 6:19

“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands.” 1 John 5:1

“Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. So watch yourselves.’” Luke 17:1-3a

Principles

There are four principles that should guide decisions and actions regarding appropriate risk management:

Principle 1. As risk increases, supervision should also increase.

Therefore, more supervision is required for a youth overnight lock-in than a Sunday School class, for example.

Principle 2. Risk increases as isolation increases.

Therefore, care must be taken in such things as when and where an activity is held, and whether doors are open or closed.

Principle 3. Risk increases as accountability decreases.

Therefore, workers should be screened and must obtain approval in advance before sponsoring any activity.

Principle 4. Risk increases when there is an imbalance of power and control (age, size, position, authority). Therefore, care must be taken to maintain a proper age balance between children. Approximately 25% of abuse cases are children molesting children. There is an especially high risk when there is a difference of 5 years or more among children's ages.

Definition of Terms

Abuse – The non-accidental infliction, or the threat to create or inflict, a physical or mental injury.

Emotional Abuse – any attempt to inflict mental or emotional damage, which can include such patterns of behavior as verbal assault, threats, intimidation, ridicule, indifferent or ignoring behavior. **Physical Abuse** –any act which, regardless of intent, results in a non-accidental physical injury.

Physical Neglect—the failure to provide for a child's physical survival needs to the extent that there is harm or risk of harm to the child's health or safety.

Sexual Abuse –acts of sexual assault or sexual exploitation, whether a single incident or many acts over a long period of time. Sexual abuse may not involve violence and is often perpetrated by someone known to the child.

Child Abuse – any form of non-accidental infliction of injury to the detriment of the physical, emotional, or mental well-being of a child under 18.

Church – St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Falls Church, Virginia.

Minor (sometimes "children and youth") – any person under the age of 18

Personnel (sometimes "worker") – any volunteer, employee, church worker, principal, Preschool teacher or pastor working in or on behalf of the congregation of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Falls Church, Virginia

Level I – any church/school personnel working independently with children and youth, without supervision

Level II – any church/school personnel working with and under supervision of a Level I worker. (Example: teens helping with Vacation Bible School)

Supervisory board – the group responsible for a given ministry within the structure of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Falls Church, Virginia

Supervisory role – any adult in charge of a specified event or activity

Guidelines for Ministry to Minors

Leadership in the children and youth ministries of St. Paul's Lutheran Church and Preschool are responsible for sharing the following guidelines with paid and volunteer personnel and monitoring their compliance.

1. No worker will be accepted who has prior convictions of sexual misconduct , child abuse, or any crime classified as a "barrier crime" under code of Virginia section 63.2-1719.
2. All workers shall be informed of these guidelines, which they are required to follow in their activities with minors and **shall be required to sign a statement that they will faithfully follow them.**
3. The child risk screening process for each worker will be repeated if there is reason to suspect that the information originally provided in the Child Risk Screening Form has changed. The screening process may be repeated at the discretion of the Pastor, the Director of Education and Family Life, or the Preschool Director.
4. No Level I volunteer shall be allowed independent direct interaction with children and youth until said person has been known to the pastor/principal or to the supervisory board responsible for the ministry for a period of no less than six months. Level I volunteer refers to any church/school personnel working independently with children and youth, without supervision.

Supervision of Minors

1. All children should be properly supervised when present in the building. Parents and workers should not leave children unattended or let them wander the building without proper adult supervision.
2. It is our goal to have at least two unrelated children's program workers present in all classes, clubs or activities involving children and youth. 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 and there should be no fewer than three students with the adult teacher. Also, any off-campus activities require at least two adult workers to be present.
3. All special events, outings, field trips, parties, extra-curricular activities and any off-campus activities require parental permission slips. Signed permission slips must be gathered by the adult worker coordinating the activity.
4. Personnel in supervisory roles shall immediately report to the Senior Pastor any incidents which could be perceived as sexual misconduct or child abuse. The Pastor will conduct the initial evaluation of any report of suspected abuse, complying fully with all obligations of civil law, notifying law enforcement and Child Protective Services if needed, and cooperating fully with local authorities to the extent consistent with all legal obligations and applicable legal privileges. All individuals required by law to report suspected child abuse and neglect, including paid preschool staff, must comply with the requirement to report such abuse or neglect to Child Protective Services within 72 hours of the first suspicion of abuse.
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Procedures with Minors

1. All regular children's program workers must complete and sign a Child Risk Screening Form and be approved before working with our children and youth.
2. One light must remain on at all times in a classroom that is being used.
3. Parents should meet their children, under grade 4, in the classroom or location of the activity or event. Workers should not leave children unattended. If a parent has not arrived within 10 minutes after the class or event, children should be taken to the church or preschool office.
4. Transportation to and from events is the responsibility of the families. During events, drivers should avoid dropping off or picking up minors without being accompanied by another adult. The supervisory board will set standards for who is permitted to drive during events. Any deviations should have the prior consent of the parent and be reported to the next person in the line of responsibility.
5. There are no "secret" activities or organizations recognized by St. Paul's Lutheran Church and Preschool. Parents are welcome to observe their child in any class or activity. As a courtesy to our personnel, we ask that parents inform the supervising adult of their desire to observe, prior to the beginning of the activity. Parents should not disrupt or interfere with the activity.
6. A worker must accompany all children through age 4 to the restroom. Workers should enter the restroom stall only to assist a child when necessary.
7. Topics, vocabulary and attire that could not be used or worn comfortably in the presence of parents should not be employed with children and youth.
8. Alcohol should not be used by adult supervisors prior to or during activities scheduled with children and youth. Alcohol is not permitted to be provided to anyone under age 21.
9. All workers should use good judgment when having physical contact with children and youth. Workers are cautioned not to touch minors in any way that would appear intimate, threatening or frightening. Minors should not be forced to give physical contact such as kisses, hugs or sitting on an adult's lap. Children and youth are not to be intimidated, grabbed forcibly, shaken or struck.
10. A worker must maintain a professional posture, avoiding emotional attachment and remaining aware of a child's powerful attraction to persons in authority and trust.
11. If a worker suspects that a minor is in an unsafe or abusive home he/she must report it immediately to a supervisory church/school official.
12. If a worker is seen endangering a child or acting inappropriately, a church/school official must be contacted immediately.
13. At the time of registration, parents will be given an opportunity to decline having their child photographed for use in publications or displays.
14. The nursery shall have an identification system that links the child with the parent in a way that prevents the possibility of someone else taking the child. A check-in/check-out system will be used along with a simple child identification system while children are in the nursery.

Child Risk Incident Response Plan

As mandated by Virginia Code 63.2-1509, all professional staff of the Preschool, including teachers, are **required** to report suspected child abuse or neglect to the Fairfax County Department of Child Protective Services (CPS) within 72 hours of the first suspicion of abuse.

A report is made by calling the Fairfax County child abuse hotline at 703-324-7400. Reports may be made 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Volunteer workers must report to the Senior Pastor, the Director of Education and Family Life, or the Preschool Director when there is suspicion that a minor with whom they have had contact in their working capacity has been subjected to abuse or neglect. This includes any incident of suspected child abuse that takes place at St. Paul's Lutheran Church and Preschool.

Reporting Protocol

When an incident of any sort occurs during the course of a church/school sponsored activity, the worker who witnesses or becomes aware of the incident must take the following steps:

1. Respond promptly to any injury, whether due to an accident or interpersonal activity.
2. Assess whether medical assistance is required. Treat the injury or get immediate medical assistance.
3. Notify the victim's parents.
4. Complete an **Accident Report** immediately after completing numbers 1-3 above, and file it with the appropriate church/school official. If the seriousness of the accident warrants it, a copy should also be filed with the Senior Pastor.
5. If there is suspicion of sexual, physical or emotional abuse, immediately report the suspected abuse to the senior Pastor. If the Senior Pastor is accused of misconduct, the allegations should be reported to the Assistant pastor. The Pastor will conduct the initial evaluation of any report of suspected abuse, complying fully with all obligations of civil law, notifying law enforcement and Child Protective Services if needed, and cooperating fully with local authorities to the extent consistent with all legal obligations and applicable legal privileges. All individuals required by law to report suspected child abuse and neglect, including paid preschool staff, must comply with the requirement to report such abuse or neglect to Child Protective Services within 72 hours of the first suspicion of abuse.