

Presbytery of Western North Carolina Child & Youth Protection Policy

ADOPTED 7-28-20

1 BACKGROUND

1.1 THEOLOGICAL INTRODUCTION:

As Scripture tells us, “Children are a heritage from the Lord” (Psalm 127:3). The covenant of baptism unites all Christians in a commitment to care for and nurture our children. Recognizing that nurturing and protecting children and young people is paramount, the Presbytery of Western North Carolina (“the Presbytery”) seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for children and youth who participate in our programs and activities. A safe and secure environment supports all people to know themselves as beloved children of God, which requires the provision of physical safety and access; the protection from harassment, abuse, and bullying; the assurance of care from peers and mentors; and the outpouring of God’s love for each individual. By implementing the practices in this directive, the Presbytery affirms our commitment to protect the children and youth in our care from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior, while at the same time protecting our staff and volunteers from false accusations.

1.2 BOOK OF ORDER

This policy is developed so that we are in compliance with the PCUSA Book of Order: “All councils shall adopt and implement a ... a child protection policy.” (G-3.0106) These guidelines do not apply to programs, events, activities, or ministries that are sponsored by sessions or congregations of the Presbytery, as each session must be guided by its own child protection policy required under the Book of Order (G-3.0106). This policy does not apply to Camp Grier which now operates independent of the Presbytery of Western North Carolina, Inc. and is responsible for developing its own policy.

1.3 SCOPE & LIMITATIONS

This policy applies to meetings, events or activities that are explicitly coordinated by the staff of the Presbytery of Western North Carolina and its committees when such events include or involve children or youth under the age of 18, either as the focus of the event or in a separate child care setting during an adult event. Hereafter in this policy these meetings, events or activities are known as “event(s).”

This policy applies to the following categories of adults:

- Presbytery Volunteers who serve in a leadership capacity through the Presbytery Youth Committee or the Presbytery Youth Council

- Congregational Chaperones from a participating congregation who attends a presbytery event in a youth advisor capacity
- Paid Leaders who are hired by the presbytery to lead a particular event

In instances where youth gather for an event of less than 12 hours in length, chaperones are assumed to be cleared under the child and youth protection policy of their local congregation. At these events, these chaperones are expected to be with their youth from their church for the duration of the event.

1.4 TIME FRAMES

Presbytery Volunteers who are approved per this policy normally retain that approval for a period of 4 years. After 4 years, new background checks and training programs are required. The right to revoke these privileges at any time is retained. If any new information arises about an individual that casts suspicion or violates these policies, the approval will be revoked or suspended immediately by the Stated Clerk.

1.5 APPROVED TRAINING PROGRAMS

Adults seeking approval as Presbytery Volunteers shall ordinarily take part in Sacred Boundaries Training offered by the Presbytery of Western North Carolina. These training sessions will always have a component on Child, Youth and Vulnerable Adult protection. If a Presbytery Leader is not able to attend the Sacred Boundaries Training, then one of these alternative trainings can qualify as a substitute

- [Darkness to Light \(www.d2l.org/\)](http://www.d2l.org/) offers an online training program empowering adults to prevent child sexual abuse. If this is the first time Darkness to Light training is utilized, begin with the [Stewards of Children](http://www.d2l.org/education/stewards-of-children/) program (www.d2l.org/education/stewards-of-children/)
- Classes offered in a local PCUSA congregation prescribed by its Child and Youth Protection Policy.
- Other training programs may be considered adequate if reviewed and approved by the Sacred Boundaries Team.

In addition, training will be provided for youth participating on the Presbytery Youth Council annually.

Congregational Chaperones will be required to be trained through their local PCUSA congregation prescribed by its Child and Youth Protection Policy.

Paid Leaders will not be required to undergo training, but will be held accountable to the guidelines of this policy (see 2.2 below). The presbytery seeks to recruit Paid Leaders with past experience of working with youth and compliance with equivalent protection policies.

1.6 POLICY AVAILABILITY

This policy shall be publicly available on the Presbytery's website and by request through the Presbytery Office. It should be reviewed and updates presented to Presbytery for approval as needed, at least once every 3 years.

2 PREVENTION PROCEDURES

2.1 SCREENING OF PRESBYTERY VOLUNTEERS

A. Presbytery Volunteers are adults normally 21 years or older who serve in a leadership capacity through the Presbytery Youth Committee or the Presbytery Youth Council. Both the Youth Committee and Youth Council oversee and lead presbytery-wide events for our youth. Presbytery Volunteers (who are not minister members of the presbytery) must be affiliated with a congregation of the Presbytery and have been known to that congregation for at least six months. There shall be no exceptions to the 6-months rule.

B. All Presbytery Volunteers shall be subject to a nationwide criminal background check that includes a sex offender registry check.

C. With written certification of a satisfactory background check and completion of a training specified above, individuals may be approved for service as a Presbytery Volunteer.

2.2 SCREENING OF PAID LEADERS for PRESBYTERY EVENTS

A. All adult leaders who are paid to provide leadership at a presbytery youth/child event shall be subject to a nationwide criminal background check that includes a sex offender registry check, administered by the PWNC office.

B. All Paid Leaders will receive, sign, and be accountable in accordance with the Presbytery Child/Youth Protection policy.

2.3 SCREENING OF CONGREGATIONAL CHAPERONES

A. Congregational Chaperones who attend a presbytery event of duration longer than 12 hours shall be screened using the child protection policies applicable in their congregation.

B. The registration process for presbytery events of duration longer than 12 hours shall include the submission of the certification form for Congregational Chaperones in Appendix A.

2.4 PERMISSIBLE, MANDATED AND PROHIBITED PRACTICES

A. Two Adult Rule/Rule of Three

The normal practice is to have at least two adult leaders present for any activity at the retreat. This practice protects the youth from situations where abuse may occur, while also protecting leaders from possible false allegations of abuse or inappropriate behavior. If it is impractical to have more than one adult constantly present, there must be arrangements for another adult to check in periodically to ensure that appropriate protection standards are being maintained, and that the adult is maintaining a safe environment. A two-adult rule applies in any meeting situation whether in person or online.

Youth participants are to be guided by the Rule of Three, meaning they are not to go off by themselves alone or in pairs but in groups of at least three.

B. Age Difference

Normally at least one of the adult leaders will be at least three years older than the oldest child or youth being supervised.

C. Adult to Child Ratios

The ideal adult to youth ratio for all youth-related events/activities is 2:14. There shall also be one adult of each gender when there is one or more minors of each gender in a group. Only in emergency situations may the ratios and gender diversity be compromised. The minimum age to be considered a leader in fulfilling this ratio is 21. A two-adult rule applies in any meeting situation whether in person or online.

D. One-on-one interactions

Because most abuse occurs when an adult is alone with a child, private one-on-one meetings with a child are prohibited unless absolutely necessary and another adult is notified before the meeting occurs. When deemed pastorally necessary, the following guidelines shall apply to one-on-one interactions:

- 1) All one to one meetings with a child or youth will occur in a public place where others can see you. This means never be the only two in a building; rather, go outside or meet at another time and place, or call someone to be with you in the building.
- 2) Before meeting alone with a child or youth, notify another adult leader so that they can be aware to check on you at any time.
- 3) If meeting in a room or office, leave the door open or move to an area that can be easily observed by others passing by.
- 4) All physical signs of affection that can be misinterpreted will be avoided (see 2.4 E and F below)
- 5) Document and immediately report any unusual incidents, including disclosures of abuse or maltreatment, behavior problems and how they were handled, injuries, or any other interactions that might be misinterpreted. See Incident Reporting Form Guide in Section 7. Submit

this documentation to the Associate for Youth Ministries or the General
Presbyter within 3 days of the incident.

E. Physical Interactions/showing Approval and Affirmation

In providing approval or affirmation, the following guidelines apply:

Appropriate Physical Interactions:

- Side hugs
- Shoulder-to-shoulder or “temple” hugs
- Pats on the back or shoulder
- Handshakes
- High-fives, hand slapping, fist bumps
- Verbal praise
- Pats on head when culturally appropriate
- Holding hands for prayer or for escorting young children

Remember, at any time these permissible interactions may be inappropriate if unwanted by the recipient. Adults should always verbally ask for permission before making any physical contact with a child or youth.

Inappropriate Physical Interactions:

- Kisses
- Touching bottom, chest, or genital area
- Expressing affection to a youth when you are one-on-one
- Lap sitting
- Wrestling
- Piggyback rides
- Allowing child/youth to hang on your leg
- Tickling
- Any type of massage
- Any type of affection that is unwanted by
- Compliments related to physique or body development

F. Verbal Interactions / showing Approval and Affirmation Appropriately

Our words with children/youth can establish respect. The following guidelines apply:

Appropriate Verbal Interactions

- Positive reinforcement
- Jokes appropriate to age and context of the child
- Corrective discipline/boundary setting
- Encouragement/praise
- Prayer
- Written thanks

- Teaching
- Intentional educational and theological conversations around faith and sexuality (in the context of the faith and sexuality event, for example)

Inappropriate Verbal Interactions

- Name-calling
- Discussing sexual encounters
- Secrets
- Cursing
- Off-color or sexual jokes
- Shaming and/or belittling
- Sarcasm that can be easily misinterpreted
- Harsh language that may frighten, threaten or humiliate children
- Derogatory remarks about the child or their family
- Attempts to involving children in your personal problems or issues of other adult leaders

G. Media Release

Videos/pictures will be routinely taken and used for print publication and on social media. When a congregation leader is registering their youth for the presbytery's youth events, they will have the option to "Opt Out" particular individuals so their youth will not be included in the event media. On occasion, group or candid photos/videos will be taken that may, unintentionally, include event participants.

H. Social Networking Code of Conduct

Leaders using any social media platform (Instagram, Facebook, Zoom, Google Hangouts, etc.) as well digital communication (texting, emails) to interact with youth or other leaders shall comply with this Social Networking Code of Conduct. Youth participants are discouraged from bringing phones and other digital devices on the retreat, and will not be allowed to use them during retreat activities.

- 1) Adult leaders are discouraged from establishing direct social media connections/texting with youth and are instead encouraged to interact openly in the Presbytery Youth Council (PYC) Group page so that all comments are public.
- 2) Comments that are, or could be, construed by any observer to be harsh, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating shall never be posted to or about any youth or youth leader.
- 3) All sexually oriented conversations or discussions about sexual activities are prohibited.
- 4) Adults are prohibited from posting inappropriate pictures (for example, sexually suggestive, exploitive, or voyeuristic) or making inappropriate comments on pictures others post.

- 5) Presbytery Volunteers shall not privately message a youth via text or other social media platform. The Associate for Youth Ministries may interact with youth over the age of 13 about pastoral matters and should inform the youth's pastor or another appropriate adult of such interaction.
- 6) These rules apply to all social media platforms, including texting.
- 7) If a person fails a background check at any point, they shall immediately disconnect themselves from all social media, email and text connections with youth that were established through Presbytery activities or events.

H. Overnight arrangements, sleeping rooms, showering

- 1) For overnight events with group sleeping rooms/cabins, there must be at least two adults of the same gender as the youth in the room. Adults are there to provide a safe environment and to encourage sleep when it's time for lights out. If adults choose to sleep separately, they must remain close by so as to regularly check on the behavior and ensure the safety of the group members. When possible, youth should sleep with at least three youth in a room.
- 2) Under no circumstance should an adult share a bed with a child unless that adult is the child's parent.
- 3) Adults are to change clothes in private areas and avoid disrobing directly in front of others. Youth are also encouraged to change clothes/disrobe in private areas where possible.
- 4) For showering, single occupancy units with curtains are to be used for privacy.
- 5) The minimum grade level for youth staying overnight at any presbytery youth event is 6th grade (if it is a summer event, it is the grade the student will enter in the fall).
- 6) Members of the presbytery youth council who turned 18 are considered adults, and must comply with this policy.
- 7) Violation of these rules and requirements will result in the immediate removal of the adult from the current, and all future, youth events of the presbytery.

I. LGBTQ Inclusion/Protection

As we seek to provide a safe and secure environment for all participants, intentional steps are needed to address LGBTQ participants. Open communication between LGBTQ youth, their parents, and the group's main leader is strongly encouraged before attending the retreat. Education is important so brief definitions are provided in section 6.

- 1) At overnight events, participants typically sleep in lodging areas according to their gender. Transgender youth will be allowed to sleep in the room according to their gender identity, but there is not a "one-size-fits-all" housing policy for transgender or gender non-conforming youth. Some transgender youth may feel more comfortable housing with the gender that correlates with their gender expression, others with their biological sex. Thus, it is vitally important for the group leader to

openly communicate with the transgender youth (and ideally, their parents) before the retreat about their sleeping preference in order to facilitate inclusion. While it is not required that a parent inform presbytery staff about a transgender or gender non-conforming youth participant, the Associate for Youth of the presbytery is available for such a conversation in order to aid the child in having a positive experience.

- 2) All participants will use the bathroom that corresponds with their expressed gender identity. Any youth or adult who has a need or desire for increased privacy, regardless of the underlying reason, should be provided access to a single user restroom. However, no participant shall be required to use such a restroom because they are transgender or gender nonconforming. If another participant expressed discomfort with sharing space with an LGBTQ youth, that person can use a separate, private space.
- 3) PYC youth and presbytery leaders will receive training for best practices regarding anti-bullying as well as the inclusion of LGBTQ participants. The goal is to provide an emotionally and physically safe environment for all.

J. Infants and Young Children

Presbytery is not equipped or prepared to care for children who are under the age of 4. Such infants and young children must be cared for by adults who have met local church requirements and are under the child protection policy of a local congregation or cared for by the child's parent during Presbytery activities.

K. Informing Youth about these Guidelines

While this policy lays out best practices and norms for various adult leaders to follow, these practices are also meant to guide and protect youth who are participating in Presbytery-sponsored events. It is the responsibility of Presbytery Volunteers and Congregational Chaperones to familiarize youth about these practices. This should be done at the beginning of a retreat, leaving time for questions from the youth participants.

3 TRANSPORTATION PROCEDURES

- A. Buses and Vans used for Presbytery events must be used in accordance with the church policy and insurance company requirements of the church that owns the bus or van.
- B. The Presbytery may from time to time employ a professional bus service for away events like Montreat Youth Conference, Mission Trips, Triennium or other away trips.
- C. For all bus, mini-bus or van use, two adults must be on the vehicle; the driver may be one of the two.
- D. This policy does not apply to churches who bring their youth to and from events in their vehicles as these drivers must comply with the standards of their congregation over which the Presbytery has no control.

- E. Presbytery volunteers normally should not use personal vehicles for transporting youth during an event. If picking up from home or taking a child/youth home in a personal vehicle is necessary then, for the child's safety, the parent(s) should be notified with a phone call and asked to give their approval. This provision does not prohibit Congregational Chaperones from transporting youth from their own groups to and from youth events.

4 REPORTING PROCEDURES

A. REPORTING and RESPONDING

1. Reporting of juvenile abuse: North Carolina requires "any person or institution who has cause to suspect that any juvenile is abused, neglected, or dependent... or has died as a result of maltreatment" to make a report to the county department of social services where the child resides or is found.
2. Reporting a policy violation: Anyone suspecting or having knowledge of a violation of this child and youth protection policy must report such violation to any leader of the presbytery sponsored event or to the Stated Clerk. Reporting of incidents under this section is not limited to interactions between an adult and a youth. **Any adult receiving information under this section shall share that information immediately with the Stated Clerk who may activate the full response procedure outlined in other Presbytery Policies and the Book of Order.**

B. RECORDING

Those to whom reports are made should make written notes including the following information:

- 1) What happened? (Describe in detail what you saw, heard or thought happened.)
- 2) Who was present – both involved in the incident and as witnesses?
- 3) What action was taken at the time of the incident to stop it, get medical care or provide safety?
- 4) When were the parents informed and by whom?
- 5) What follow-up action is expected, mandated or needed?
- 6) See the reporting form guide in the appendix

NOTE: It is a class C Felony to fail to report child abuse or neglect (Physical, Sexual or verbal) in NC Code: NCGS 7B-301(b) found at https://www.ncleg.gov/EnactedLegislation/Statutes/PDF/BySection/Chapter_7B/GS_7B-301.pdf

C. Book of Order 2019-2021 Requirements

“G-4.0302 Mandatory Reporting Any member of this church engaged in ordered ministry and any certified Christian educator employed by this church or its congregations, shall report to ecclesiastical and civil legal authorities knowledge of harm, or the risk of harm, related to the physical abuse, neglect, and/or sexual molestation or abuse of a minor or an adult who lacks mental capacity when (1) such information is gained outside of a confidential communication as defined in G-4.0301, (2) she or he is not bound by an obligation of privileged communication under law, or (3) she or he reasonably believes that there is risk of future physical harm or abuse.”

5 RESPONDING PROCEDURES

The response to allegations of misconduct shall be undertaken in accordance with the Sexual Misconduct Policy of the Presbytery of Western North Carolina as are established and maintained by the Presbytery and the Book of Order of the Presbyterian Church USA and in compliance with the Laws of the State of North Carolina.

6 DEFINITIONS

Child/Children are persons ages five to ten.

Youth are persons ages eleven to seventeen.

Minor is a person who has not turned 18 years of age.

Adult is any person 18 years and older.

Presbytery Volunteer is an adult who serves in a leadership capacity through the Presbytery Youth Committee or the Presbytery Youth Council.

Congregational Chaperone is an adult from a participating congregation who attends a presbytery event in a chaperone capacity.

Paid Leader is an adult who is being paid by the presbytery to lead a particular event.

LGBTQ is a combination of letters meant to represent persons who identify in the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer communities.

Gender identity is the personal sense of one's own gender. Gender identity can correlate with a person's assigned sex at birth or can differ from it.

Gender expression is a the external appearance of one's gender identity, usually expressed through behavior, clothing, haircut or voice.

Gender non-conforming means exhibiting behavioral, cultural, or psychological traits that do not correspond with the traits typically associated with one's sex; having a gender expression that does not conform to gender norms.

Transgender is a term used to describe people whose gender identity differs from their assigned sex at birth.

**Presbytery of Western North Carolina
Incident Reporting Form Guide**

Name and church of Person Completing the form:

How can you be contacted: (phone/email)

1. At what event did this incident happen? (Event Name, Date, Location)

2. What Child (or Children) were involved in the incident? (first and last name please)

3. What happened? (Describe in detail what you saw, heard or thought happened.)

4. Who was present – both involved in the incident and as witnesses?

5. What action was taken at the time of the incident to stop it, get medical care or provide safety?

6. When were the parents informed and by whom? (Please name the parent that was informed.)

7. What follow-up action is expected, mandated or needed?

Date you completed and sent or emailed this form to the Presbytery Office.

Please use additional paper to give a complete report of what happened and other helpful details.

1. Keep a confidential copy of this form for your records
2. Give a copy to the Stated Clerk or Associate for Youth Ministries. c/o Presbytery Office, 114 Silver Creek Rd., Morganton, NC 28655

NOTE: It is a Class 1 misdemeanor to fail to report child abuse or neglect (Physical, Sexual or Verbal) See NCGS 7B- 301

**Presbytery of Western North Carolina
Congregational Chaperones Certification Form**

Church of Membership/affiliation:

Presbytery Event(s):

No later than one week prior to the event, please indicate the following about each adult chaperone who plans to attend with your congregation:

Has this person been a member or affiliate of your congregation for at least six months?

Has this person successfully completed the screening procedures for youth and child protection in your congregation, including a national criminal background check that includes a sex offender registry check? If so, when?

If applicable to the duties expected at this event, has this person successfully passed the congregation's motor vehicle driving check?

If applicable, has this person certified that he or she has NOT previously renounced the jurisdiction of the PC(USA) as the accused in the midst of a disciplinary proceeding as a teaching elder (Minister of Word and Sacrament) pursuant to G-2.0509 of the Book of Order?

Notes/comments

By signing this form you are affirming that there is no reason known to you why this person should be barred from serving as a chaperone at Presbytery events.

Signature of Congregation's Staff Member, Pastor, Clerk, Moderator or Ruling Elder
Responsible for Background Checks and Training:

Signature:

Date:

Print Name:

Position:

Presbytery of Western North Carolina
Presbytery Volunteer Receipt of Policy Form

Yes, I, (name) have received a copy of the “Child & Youth Protection Policy” of the Presbytery of Western North Carolina on or about (date).

Initial all that you can affirm:

I have read the policy.

I have been an active member of _____ Presbyterian Church (USA) for more than 6 months.

I affirm that I am willing to comply with the terms of this policy in my own interaction with youth and children and in social media.

I attest that my own social media accounts do not have any images, comments, or posts that would be considered to be showing or promoting drunkenness, lude behavior, or crass language.

Furthermore, if I am aware of, or witness, violations of this policy I will report such violations to the General Presbytery or the Associate for Youth Ministries as soon as reasonably possible.

If I am personally a witness to an incident involving a child or am told by a child of abuse, neglect or misconduct, I will report the incident according to the guidelines of this policy including a written report submitted to the General Presbyter or the Associate for Youth Ministries.

I understand that the approval to work with youth and children at Presbytery events is valid for 3 years and that it is renewable.

I have or am planning to complete _____ training program.

When a background check is conducted on me this item may be found, for which I give this statements of clarification:

Signature

Print Name

Date

This form is to be mailed or faxed to Associate for Youth Ministries, Presbytery of Western North Carolina, 114 Silver Creek Rd, Morganton, NC 28655