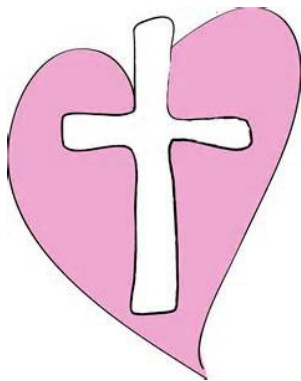


The Church of the Covenant

Child Protection Policy



Safe Church
Safe Kids
Matthew 19:14

The Church of the Covenant Child Protection Policy

REVISED and APPROVED by SESSION—February 4, 2013

REVISED by Christian Education Committee, March 23, 2015

APPROVED by SESSION, April 6, 2015

General Purpose Statement: Jesus said, “Whoever welcomes (a) child...welcomes me” (Matthew 18:5). Children are our present and our future, our hope, our teachers, our inspiration. They are full participants in the life of the church and the realm of God.

God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children, youth, and other vulnerable persons from sexual, emotional, and physical abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults grow safe and strong.

The Church of the Covenant (COTC) seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children and youth who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the following practices, our goal is to protect the children and youth of The Church of the Covenant from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteers from false accusations.

All “outside” organizations and programs using the church such as Boy Scouts, AA, Al Anon, Family Promise, Habitat for Humanity, or others shall be governed by this Child Protection Policy. The leader will be given a copy to read and asked to sign a form stating that they have read the policy and will abide by the guidelines. Guests and organizations with children and youth using church facilities will be expected to stay in designated secure areas and parents and/or leaders of those groups are required to supervise children and youth to remain in those secure areas.

I. SCREENING PROCEDURES

A. BACKGROUND CHECK

As a condition of employment at COTC, all employees must undergo child abuse, criminal, and F.B.I. fingerprinting background checks. Also, all COTC volunteers 18 and older, who have direct contact with children and youth under the age of 18, are required to have the following background clearances: child abuse, criminal, and F.B.I. fingerprinting. In lieu of F.B.I. fingerprinting, a volunteer who has lived in Pennsylvania more than 10 years may sign an F.B.I. finger print letter which swears and affirms they are not prohibited from volunteering in another state.

EXAMPLES OF VOLUNTEER INVOLVEMENT:

1. Those adult volunteers who will be involved in all children and youth programs. This includes but is not limited to Sunday School, Nursery, Youth Group activities, mission trips, retreats, church-sponsored athletic teams, vehicle drivers, and summer programs.
2. Those adult volunteers who will be involved in overnight activities with minors.
3. Those adult volunteers counseling minors.
4. Those adult volunteers involved in one-on-one mentorship of minors.
5. All volunteer positions involving direct contact with children or youth.

Before a background check is run, prospective employees and adult volunteers will be asked to sign an authorization as part of the application form allowing the church to run background checks.

What constitutes as a disqualifying offense that will prevent an individual from working with children or youth will be determined by PA Child Protection Laws, Senior Pastor, Director of Christian Education, Director of Youth Ministry, Clerk of Session, and/or Chair of Personnel on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. Generally, convictions for an offense involving children, felonies or offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to our mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children or youth. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying event.

The background check authorization form and results will be confidentially stored at The Church of The Covenant on a need-to-know basis.

Volunteers who have clearances from present employment, or have obtained clearances on their own, may submit copies of those clearances. All clearances must have been obtained within 36 months or less.

An exception to the background check requirement will be made for an adult chaperone for a one-time event, generally a parent of a participant.

B. WRITTEN APPLICATION

All employees and adult volunteers who desire to work with children or youth at COTC will complete a written application form providing basic personal background information including present and/or previous employment, previous experience working with children or youth, previous church affiliations, references and disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. Such information will be likewise confidentially stored at COTC.

Applicants for employment will proceed with the interview process outlined by the Personnel Committee.

C. PERSONAL INTERVIEW

Upon completion of the application, a personal interview will be conducted by the Director of Christian Education and/or the Director of Youth Ministry, and/or the Senior Pastor to discuss the volunteer's suitability for working with children and youth.

D. REFERENCE CHECKS

Before a volunteer is permitted to work with children or youth, current clearances will be checked and on file, and at least two of the volunteer's references will be checked. Those references will preferably include churches and organizations where the volunteer has previously worked with children. Any documentation of reference checks will also be confidentially stored.

E. SIX MONTH RULE

No adult volunteer will be considered for any position involving contact with children and youth until he/she has been an active attending member of COTC for a minimum of six (6) months. This allows sufficient interaction with COTC staff and leadership to better evaluate the volunteer. This rule may be waived at the discretion of both the Senior Pastor and Director of Christian Education after personal interview and suitable verification of the volunteer's background and character.

II. STAFF SUPERVISION GUIDELINES

All meetings of children and/or youth affiliated with The Church of the Covenant will be governed by the following guidelines:

A. TWO ADULT RULE

Two approved adults must be present at all times. This applies to classroom activities, activities away from the church facility and when transporting children and youth. Teachers should be assigned in teams of two or more per Sunday school hour to every class of children or youth. Concerted effort will be made to recruit sufficient numbers of volunteer teachers/leaders to permit such team teaching. When feasible, both male and female leaders would be present. If the group stays overnight at the church, or if a church sponsored group leaves the premises, two or more leaders must be present and must include at least one male and female if the group is mixed gender. See additional specifications for youth or children's overnight stay in *away from the church* in section II-H of this document.

B. NURSERY CHECKOUT PROCEDURE

All parents utilizing the church nursery will observe the check-in/check-out procedure including signing in for their child and taking a pager for notification within the church. Parents should remain on the premises. If someone else other than the parent will be picking up the child that person's name must be provided by the parent in writing. Photo identification must be provided before the child is released, unless that person is already known to those in charge of the nursery.

C. OPEN DOOR POLICY

Further protection for the children or youth requires that an open door policy be followed. This policy provides that the parents of the children or youth served, the clergy, administrative, and professional staffs of the church all have the right to visit and observe the children's/youth activity, classroom, or church-sponsored program at any time, unannounced.

D. OUTSIDE ACCESS

There must be access to a land line phone or cell phone when groups are at or away from the church facility. The church office or an authorized church representative will be given this number prior to the group's departure from church property so that the group can be contacted.

E. DOORS and WINDOWS

All classroom and office doors will have a window or visibility from hallway or remain open while occupied. Windows will be kept free from adornment. If accessible from outside the building, windows will be kept locked at all times. Doors that do not have visibility from the outside will be replaced with doors with window when replacement is needed. Secure areas will be provided within the church building for children and youth generally and particularly for overnight stays.

F. INDIVIDUAL COUNSELING/MENTORING

One-on-one interactions are sometimes necessary and appropriate but care must be taken that they be conducted in an environment that provides visibility by other adults. If at all possible, another adult is to have knowledge of staff members' whereabouts and with whom they are meeting. **MENTORING SHOULD BE**

DONE WITH THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE CHILD OR YOUTH'S PARENTS, IN A PUBLIC SETTING. MENTORS SHOULD COMPLETE AN APPLICATION TO BE A VOLUNTEER INCLUDING ALL CLEARANCES.

Children and youth receiving individual counseling/**MENTORING** should be told they are free to discuss any aspects of the counseling/**MENTORING** process with a parent or other adult, especially if they are uncomfortable about anything that occurs in counseling/**MENTORING**. Team counseling is preferable wherever possible.

All incidents of suspect abuse or neglect or criminal behavior revealed during a counseling/**MENTORING** session must be reported to PA Childline and then to the Senior Pastor. In addition to making a report to PA Childline, law enforcement authorities should be notified if there is imminent danger to the child or ongoing abusive or criminal behavior. Confidentiality will be maintained except for report and cooperation with necessary authorities. (See attachment, **WHEN/HOW TO REPORT**)

G. TOUCH

Physical affection should be appropriate to the age of the child or youth. Touching should be initiated by the child or youth. It should be in response to the youth or child's need for comforting, encouragement, or affection. It should not be based upon the adult's emotional need. Ideally, touching and affection should only be given in the presence of other children's ministry or youth workers. It is much less likely that touches will be inappropriate or misconstrued as such when two adult workers are present and the touching is open to observation. This is especially important when diapering a baby or helping a young child change clothes or use the restroom. Touching behavior should not give even the appearance of wrongdoing. As ministry workers, our behavior must foster trust at all times. It should be above reproach. A youth or child's preference not to be touched should be respected. Do not force affection upon a reluctant youth or child. Church workers are responsible to protect children and youth under their supervision from inappropriate touching by others. (See attachment, **WHEN/ HOW TO REPORT**)

H. OUTINGS AWAY FROM CHURCH PROPERTY

All children and youth participating in out-of-town and over-night outings must have written consent and a medical release form. (Medical release and consent forms may be completed for a one-year period and must be renewed annually). There must be access to a land line phone or cell phone when groups are away from the church property. In no circumstance is one adult (other than the parent) to take any children or youth on an overnight outing alone. On overnight outings, there will be a 1:5 staff supervision ratio observed. Female staff will supervise female children or youth in their sleeping quarters and male staff will supervise male children or youth. Married couples will not stay together but observe the female/female and male/male sleeping arrangements. With the exception of a parent/child combination, a staff and youth or child will not occupy the same bed or sleeping bag.

I. DISCIPLINE

All teachers and volunteers will use the following discipline measures:

1. If a child or youth is behaving inappropriately the teacher or volunteer will tell the child or youth specifically what he/she is doing that is not acceptable and state what the expected behavior is, e.g. "We do not throw the book. We use the book for reading."
2. If this measure is not effective, the child or youth will be guided to another activity.
3. If inappropriate behavior continues, the child or youth may be placed to work alone away from the other students. (TIME OUT for a specific period of time that is communicated to the child or youth.)
4. If the child or youth's disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, the teacher or volunteer will notify the Christian Education Director or the Youth Director who will talk with the child or youth and work with their parents to modify the behavior or remove the child or youth from the activity.

5. No physical punishment or verbal abuse, e.g. ridicule, are to be used at any time. If isolating the child or youth within the setting or removal of the child or youth from the room or setting becomes necessary, the situation will be discussed with the child or youth's parents or guardian as soon as possible to allow the child or youth every opportunity to change their inappropriate conduct.

J. GIFTS

No staff, either paid or volunteer, is to give gifts to individual children or young people without the prior knowledge of the parent(s) or responsible clergy. Gift giving can be a form of buying loyalty or silence. Gift giving should be done on a group basis or for special occasions only. Gifts may not be elaborate but should be modest and appropriate to the occasion.

K. TRAINING

Prior to working in the youth or children's departments, volunteers must undergo child protection safety training, and review the COTC Child Protection Policy. Initial training on issues of child sexual abuse in church settings shall be required for all clergy, paid staff, and volunteers who regularly supervise children or youth activities. In addition, a summary of current child abuse statutes and reporting requirements for your legal jurisdiction are to be made available to all clergy, paid staff, and volunteers who regularly supervise children or youth activities. Training and certification may be obtained through the following website www.reportabusepa.pitt.edu or by other means deemed appropriate through the Christian Education committee.

L. VERIFICATION of READING of POLICY STATEMENT

Upon receipt of this policy statement, the volunteer or paid staff person will read and sign a statement that he/she has read The Church of the Covenant Child Abuse Protection Policy.

III. REPORTING

- A. For purposes of this policy, "child abuse" is any recent non-accidental act or failure to act by an adult or another child which causes or creates the risk of serious physical injury, serious mental injury, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or neglect of a child under eighteen (18) years of age.
- B. Examples of child abuse include but are not limited to the following:
 1. Physical abuse such as beating, shaking, burns, bullying or biting.
 2. Emotional abuse such as yelling, constant criticism, belittling, bullying, and persistent teasing.
 3. Sexual abuse by using a child for the sexual stimulation of another.
 4. Neglect which deprives a child of their essential needs such as adequate food, water or prolonged and repeated lack of supervision which endangers their health and safety.
- C. According to the Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Law, every individual age 18 and older, which has direct contact with children through work or volunteering, is now considered a mandated self reporter of child abuse. Any person, whether having direct or indirect contact with children, is considered to be a permissive reporter and may make a report at any time if they suspect a child is the victim of abuse. Incidents of suspected child abuse should immediately be reported by the self reporter to PA Childline and appropriate authorities (See attachment WHEN/HOW TO REPORT). Immediately following, the self reporter should discuss the incident with the Senior Pastor/ Head of Staff, who will decide any further actions. If the Senior Pastor decides further action is necessary a special team consisting of the Senior Pastor, Associate Pastor, Director of C.E., Clerk of

Session, and Chair of Personnel will be convened to determine what further action, if any, is required. However, if there is imminent danger to the child or youth the above procedure should be bypassed and the local police should be immediately and directly notified (prior to reporting on line or orally to PA Childline) and the child or youth removed from any dangerous situation and their parents contacted.

- D. Once the safety of the victim has been secured, the alleged perpetrator(s) shall be removed from working with children or youth pending an investigation. If the suspected perpetrator is paid staff or clergy he/she may be suspended until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.
- E. A written incident report, along with form CY47, will be filled out by the staff member or volunteer who is the self reporter. Form CY47 does not need to be filled out when a report is made online, it is only needed when an oral report to Childline has been made. (See WHEN/HOW TO REPORT). Any further actions taken by COTC will be documented by the special team above. Session will be fully and immediately informed and the COTC insurance company contacted and counsel retained if appropriate. Washington Presbytery should also be contacted. COTC will cooperate fully with state and local authorities in any investigation conducted; recognizing that they are better trained and equipped to do such criminal investigations.
- F. In the event there is no investigation by state or local authorities, Session will appoint a team to investigate the circumstances of the incident and make recommendations, if any, to the Session. This team should act only in consultation and cooperation with those assigned by the insurance company and/or retained counsel.
- G. Public statements and media interviews will be handled under the guidance of the attorney appointed by Session to represent the church and through a Session-designated spokesperson. All staff, volunteers and church leadership, including active elders and deacons, should refrain from speaking to the media.

IV. IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

- A. Implementation of this amended policy will be completed in 2015 in accordance with the dates set forth by PA Child Protection Law.
- B. All volunteers within the children and youth ministry of Christian Education will have completed: an application, Child Abuse Clearance, Criminal Record Clearance, F.B.I. fingerprinting (or signed F.B.I. finger print letter if eligible), an interview, and a training which includes knowledge of this Child Protection Policy. That information will be securely stored by the Director of Christian Education and/or the Church Administrator.
- C. This policy will be evaluated and appropriately revised if necessary each year by the Christian Education Committee and the Director of Christian Education. Any revisions will be given to the Session of The Church of the Covenant for final approval.
- D. Volunteers and staff will participate in a training/information workshop.
- E. Clearances must be renewed every 36 months in accordance with PA state law.

V. PAYMENT OF CLEARANCES

- A. The Church of the Covenant will be responsible for the payment of clearances for all employees.
- B. The Christian Education budget is responsible for payment of the clearances for the Sunday school teachers, nursery nanny, and all nursery volunteers who are 18 and older.

- C. All other volunteers who will be interacting with children and youth at COTC are responsible for obtaining and submitting their own clearances (ex. VBS volunteers, youth volunteers). Clearances for volunteers working with children from birth through 6th grade are submitted to the Director of Christian Education. Clearances for those volunteers working with youth in 7th through 12th grade are submitted to the Director of Youth Ministry.

- D. If you are a volunteer working outside COTC and your work involves interaction with children or youth you must obtain your own clearances. Those clearances should be submitted to the outside agency with whom you volunteer.

PA Mandatory Reporting as of 12/31/14

WHEN TO REPORT

A mandated reporter must make a report of suspected child abuse if they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child is a victim of child abuse under any of the following circumstances:

- The mandated reporter comes into contact with the child in the course of employment, occupation and practice of a profession or through a regularly scheduled program, activity or service.
- The mandated reporter is directly responsible for the care, supervision, guidance or training of the child, or is affiliated with an agency, institution, organization, school, regularly established church or religious organization or other entity that is directly responsible for the care, supervision, guidance or training of the child.
- A person makes a specific disclosure to the mandated reporter that an identifiable child is the victim of child abuse.
- An individual 14 years of age or older makes a specific disclosure to the mandated reporter that the individual has committed child abuse.

HOW TO REPORT

- **FIRST:** Mandated reporters must make an immediate and direct report of suspected child abuse to Childline either electronically at www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis or by calling Childline at 1-800-932-0313.
- **SECOND:** The reporter must immediately thereafter inform the person in charge a report has been made.
- **THIRD:** The reporter must complete and mail a written CY47 report form to the local county Child Protective Services, where the incident occurred, within 48 hours after making an ORALREPORT to Childline. IF THE REPORTER FILED THE REPORT ON LINE, FORM CY47 IS NOT NECESSARY. Form CY47 may be obtained from the COTC Director of Christian Education or on line at <http://www.keepkidssafe.pa.gov/forms/index.htm>
- **Follow-up:** The Department of Human Services (DHS) will inform the reporter of the results of the investigation no later than 3 days after it is concluded, which is generally within 30-60 days. The reporter should then inform their supervisor about the follow-up report.

Remember, if there is imminent danger to the child or youth the above procedure should be bypassed and the local police should be immediately and directly notified (prior to reporting on line or orally to PA Childline) and the child or youth removed from any dangerous situation and their parents contacted.



Safe Church
Safe Kids
Matthew 19: 14

The Church of the Covenant Child Protection Policy Verification of Receipt and Reading

I have received and read The Church of the Covenant Child Protection Policy, and I (we, if representing an organization) intend to uphold and follow all of the policies therein.

Signature

Date

Name of organization if applicable _____