

INTRODUCTION

Theology

“And Jesus took a child and put him in the midst of them; and taking the child in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me.’” Adapted from Mark 9: 36-37 RSV

The congregation of Warren Wilson Presbyterian Church (hereinafter referred to as WWPC) is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, and volunteers who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the church. The following policy reflects our congregation’s commitment to preserving this church as a holy place of safety and protection for all who would enter and as a place in which all people can experience the love of God through relationships with others.

In keeping with the covenant of baptism, we commit ourselves and our resources to the nurture, care and protection of our children. We pledge to intentionally provide the structure, education, and the policies that will keep them safe from harm and abuse.

In making these promises we confess the tragic reality that churches have not always been safe places for children. Sexual abuse and exploitation can occur in all faith communities, both large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural and racial lines. We believe any abuse of a child is intolerable, and thus we must confess our complicity when we are tempted to believe “it can’t happen here.”

By establishing and implementing this policy, we not only seek to protect our church from liability but pledge to guard the honor and reputation of our Lord Jesus Christ who is head of the church. In the guidelines and procedures that follow, we intend to reflect the love and hospitality we have come to know in Jesus Christ.

The Child Protection Committee

The Child Protection Committee is a sub committee of the Christian Education committee and is made up of one member from Personnel, one member from Christian Education and at least one other at-large member of the Warren Wilson Presbyterian Church (WWPC). It is advisable that one of these members be a parent of a child or a youth. This committee will receive staff support from the part-time Christian Educator or another appropriate staff member. This committee will coordinate the training for childcare volunteers and paid staff. They will oversee the implementation of this policy.

Policy Prohibiting Abuse, Exploitation and Harassment

As a community of Christian faith, WWPC is committed to creating and sustaining programs and a community in which all can worship, learn and labor together in a setting free of discrimination, harassment, exploitation or intimidation. All associated with WWPC should be aware that the church is strongly opposed to Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Harassment and that such behavior is prohibited by church policy. It is the intention of the church to take action in an attempt to prevent and correct behavior that is contrary to this policy and, if necessary, to discipline those persons who violate this policy.

Purpose

These procedures are designed to reduce the risk of child sexual abuse in order to:

1. Provide a safe and secure environment for children, youth, adults, members, volunteers, visitors and paid staff.
2. Assist WWPC in evaluating a persons' suitability to supervise, oversee, and/or exert control over the activities of children and youth.
3. Satisfy the concerns of parents and staff members with a screening process for paid staff and volunteers.
4. Provide a system to respond to alleged victims of sexual abuse and their families, as well as the alleged perpetrator.

5. Reduce the possibility of false accusations of sexual abuse made against volunteers and paid staff.

Definitions

In order to ensure that a nurturing Christian environment for children/youth is maintained within the congregation, to protect children/youth who participate in activities sponsored by the church from sexual, mental, and/or physical abuse, and to protect the congregation's members from false allegations of abuse, this policy uses the following definitions:

1. **Child Abuse Prohibited:** Those who accept the special responsibility of working with the congregation's children/youth shall not violate that responsibility by causing physical injury, which is non-accidental; mental injury, which is non-accidental; sexual abuse or serious physical neglect of children/youth; or any other act described as child abuse by North Carolina law.

2. **Sexual Abuse Prohibited:** Those who accept the special responsibility of working with the congregation's children/youth shall not violate that responsibility by having any interaction with a child/youth where the child/youth is being used for sexual stimulation of the adult or a third person regardless of whether or not the behavior involves touching, or any other act described as sexual abuse in North Carolina law.

3. **Sexual Harassment Prohibited:** Those who accept the special responsibility of working with the congregation's children/youth shall not violate that responsibility by engaging in sexual harassment. Sexual Harassment is defined by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when submission to or rejection of this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects an individual's employment, unreasonably interferes with an individual's work performance, or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment.

Child or Youth — any person considered a minor under the laws of the State of North Carolina that is, a person who is under 18 years of age. The age of consent for sexual activity in NC is 16.

Pastor — an installed Minister of Word and Sacrament; also known as Teaching Elder

Child Protection Committee (CPC) — appointed group of persons which implements and enforces the Child Safety Policy, and reports directly to the Christian Education Committee.

Approved Adult — anyone over 21 years of age who has satisfied the training and screening requirements of the Child Safety Policy, including a background check. An Approved Adult is authorized to provide overnight and off-site supervision of children in accordance with the terms of this policy. Approved Adult positions include, but are not limited to:

Church staff, nursery staff, youth advisors and overnight chaperones, Sunday School teachers and floaters, confirmation mentors, CPC members, and members of the CE committee.

Volunteer — anyone over 21 years of age who provides short-term supervision of children under the direction of an Approved Adult. Ordinarily, volunteers are not authorized to provide overnight and off-site supervision of children. However, in extraordinary circumstances, the Child Protection Committee is authorized to provide a short term waiver of the screening and training requirements for Approved Adults so that a volunteer who otherwise complies with the Approved Adult requirements may provide overnight and off-site supervision of children. Any such short term waiver shall be issued in writing by the Chair of the CPC or a designee of the Chair, with the approval of the CPC.

Youth Volunteer — anyone 21 or less years of age who provides short-term supervision of younger children and youth, under the supervision of an Approved Adult. Ordinarily, Youth Volunteers are not authorized to provide overnight and off-site supervision of children. However, in extraordinary circumstances, the Child Protection Committee is authorized to provide a short-term waiver of the screening and training requirements for Approved Adults so that a mature Youth Volunteer who otherwise complies with the Approved Adult requirements may provide overnight and off-site supervision of children.

Any such short-term waiver shall be issued in writing by the Chair of the CPC or a designee of the Chair, with the approval of the CPC.

SCREENING AND ADMINISTRATION

Volunteer and Employee Screening Procedures

The following screening procedures are to be used with all paid staff and volunteers. All information collected should be maintained in confidence. All records should be kept in a locked cabinet.

Requirements for Child Care Workers

Before beginning their duties, all childcare workers will complete the criminal records consent form and covenant. They will be personally interviewed to assess the suitability of their character and qualifications for the position they seek. Two references will be contacted and cleared before each worker is hired and a background check will be performed. In the case that an international student is unable to have a domestic background check, a letter of reference from the college must be provided. In this situation, all efforts will be made that this individual is not left alone in a supervisory role with the children.

Additional Requirements for Child and Youth Ministry

WWPC is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment in which children and young people can learn about and experience God's love. In order to promote this, we have established the following guidelines:

- We expect that those who volunteer to work with minors will have been regularly associated with WWPC for at least six months before beginning volunteer work.
- All volunteers who regularly work with children and youth will complete and submit a written criminal background consent and covenant form.
- All volunteers and employees who regularly work with children and youth will receive training regarding safe church policy and procedures. They will sign a document that they have read and agreed to the safety policies of WWPC.
- It is the policy of this church to provide appropriate supervision and safeguards for youth activities.
- Volunteers with supervisory responsibility will monitor the facilities during activities involving children.

In the event that two partnered adults are involved with a group of children or youth, reasonable effort will be made to provide a third party.

- Youth over the age of 13 may assist an adult in supervising children with the consent of their parent.
- Written consent of one parent or guardian of a minor will be required for all activities off the church property, and any overnight activities in which a parent is not present.

Volunteer and Employee Training

Appropriate training will be required for paid childcare workers (current and future), along with Approved Adults. Trainings will be coordinated and supervised by the CPC in conjunction with the Christian Education committee and will be scheduled at least annually. **All volunteer and paid staff must complete this training once.** All members of the congregation are invited to participate in this training.

GUIDELINES FOR WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Supervision Procedures

Unless an extenuating situation exists, WWPC:

1. Will have adequate number of screened and trained paid staff or volunteers present at events involving minors. Supervision will increase in proportion to the risk of the activity. (An adequate adult ratio depends on the ages and needs of the children. This will be determined by the CE committee.)
2. Will monitor facilities during activities involving children.
3. Will release minors only to a parent or guardian, or adult designated by the parent/guardian.
4. Will prohibit staff or volunteers from transporting only one child or youth by themselves, unless approved by a parent/guardian.
5. Will require that young children be accompanied to the restroom and the paid staff or volunteer wait outside the facility to escort the child back to the activity.
6. Will encourage minors to use a "buddy system" whenever minors go on trips off of church property.
7. To the extent possible, church events that are co-educational will have both male and female chaperones.

8. Classrooms will have windows on the doors or have the door remain open if there is less than two adults supervising children.

9. Any parent or staff has the right to visit and observe the children's/youth activity, classroom, or church-sponsored program at any time, unannounced.

Behavioral Guidelines

All volunteers and paid staff will observe the following guidelines:

1. Do not provide alcoholic beverages, tobacco, drugs, contraband, or anything that is prohibited by law to minors.
2. Speaking to a minor or minors one-on-one should be done in public settings where paid staff or volunteers are in sight of other people. If one-on-one pastoral care is necessary, avoid meeting in isolated environments.
3. Avoid all inappropriate touching with minors. All touching shall be based on the needs of the individual being touched, not on the needs of the volunteer or paid staff. In the event a minor initiates inappropriate physical contact, it is expected that the adult involved will inform the minor that such touching is inappropriate.
4. Never engage in physical discipline of a minor. Volunteers and paid staff shall not abuse minors in any way, including but not limited to physical abuse, verbal/mental abuse, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse of any kind.
5. Employees and adult volunteers may not be romantically involved with program participants who are younger than 18 years of age.
6. Anyone who observes abuse of a minor will take appropriate steps to immediately intervene and provide assistance. Report any inappropriate conduct to the proper authorities and officials of WWPC for handling.

REPORTING CHILD ABUSE (NC REQUIREMENTS)

Any person or institution who has cause to suspect that a “juvenile” is abused, neglected or has died as a result of maltreatment shall report such suspected abuse or neglect to the Director of the Department of Social Services in the county where the juvenile resides or is found. The report may be made orally, by telephone or in writing.

Child Protective Services, Buncombe County Social Services, 35 Woodfin St. Asheville, NC 28802. Telephone 828.250.5900, or 211, Or call Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina, 1-800-CHILDREN. They can put you in touch with someone who can offer support and help. Or contact your Family Physician or Pediatrician, Mental Health Center, Health Department or 1-800-4-A-CHILD a National Child Abuse Hotline.

Internal guidelines for reporting suspected abuse

Anyone who has reasonable cause to suspect that a child/youth under their care, guidance or supervision, or a child/youth not directly under their care, guidance or supervision but involved in any church program or activity, has been abused by anyone (including but not limited to the child/ youth’s family or guardians) shall first contact the Buncombe County DSS and then inform the CPC chair or the Pastor and document the suspected abuse by completing a Suspected Child Abuse Incident Report. (See Appendix #10). The church is not responsible for investigating or determining whether or not abuse has occurred. The standard under the law for reporting is that “a reasonable person has cause to believe the child has been abused.” It may be necessary to question the child or person alleging the abuse has occurred; this would be to clarify solely in order to determine if there is cause to believe abuse may have occurred.

Detailed interviews and extensive questioning with the child and/or the alleged abuser should be conducted by legal authorities, not the church. If a child is injured or in pain, call 911 for an ambulance.

If any adult has reason to suspect child abuse, that person must call the local County Department of Social Services and report the abuse.

(Buncombe County DSS number 828.250.5900 or 211)

After child protective authorities have been contacted, continue with follow-up, investigation, and documentation within the church:

1. Following placement of the call to report suspected abuse to County Department of Social Services, an advocate for the child or Pastor will

inform the parent (provided that neither of the custodial parents is suspected of abuse). If a custodial parent is the alleged abuser, his or her first contact about the allegation should come from either Child & Youth Services or the police, not the church.

2. The church should not enter into discussion about the details of the complaint with the alleged abuser after a report has been filed and during the course of the legal investigation. The alleged abuser will be removed from any position in which he or she has supervisory authority over children pending the completion of the investigation.

3. The insurance company and Presbytery should be contacted after the report is filed as a matter of routine practice if the alleged abuse involves a staff person. The alleged abuser will have their ministry restricted to exclude contact with children immediately; and may be placed on paid or unpaid leave for a designated period of time during the investigation

4. If an incident is reported that does not rise to the level of making a mandated report, an advocate for the child will inform the child's parent(s) or guardian(s) of the concern and document the meeting.

Information

1. The extent to which information will be shared with the congregation will be determined by the Moderator and Session and others as appropriate. The input of the General Presbyter may be sought and, if pastoral staff is involved, the WNC Presbytery Committee on Ministry may be consulted in making this decision.

2. All necessary parties will cooperate with the investigations made by the police.

3. The Session will authorize the Pastor or Session designee to act as the official spokesperson for the congregation. Only the authorized person or persons may speak for the congregation to the news media, government agencies, attorneys, or others.

Violations of Child Safety Policy

Persons who admit to or plead guilty to or are convicted in a court of law of any form of physical or sexual abuse of a child/youth will be immediately, permanently, and completely disqualified by the Child Protection Committee (CPC) from working with children/youth in the congregation.

Persons who admit to a Pastor or any member of the CPC any type of physical or sexual abuse of a child/ youth but who have not appeared in a court of law will be disqualified from working with children/ youth in the congregation. Allegations of sexual or physical abuse shall disqualify any person from

working with children/youth until the investigation is completed. The CPC may temporarily or permanently disqualify any person(s) from working with children/youth, as the committee deems appropriate, subject to review by the Session.

Alleged violations of the policy, other than abuse, shall be immediately reported to the CPC Chair who will report it to the Pastor and the Session, if deemed appropriate. The Child Protection Committee will investigate the alleged violations of the policy. If a person(s) is found to be in violation of the policy, the CPC will recommend disqualification or disciplinary action to the Session, if any is necessary.

TRAINING AND SUPERVISION

In order to be an Approved Adult, one must participate in an initial training course. Refresher training will be required every five years.

Training for staff members and volunteers working with children and youth will make use of professional training materials on recognizing and responding to child abuse. Included will be:

- Specific materials about child sexual abuse
- Behavior signs exhibited by abused children
- The grooming process that sexual offenders often use to engage children
- How to respond to a disclosure
- Familiarity with legally mandated reporting requirements and WWPC guidelines
- Use and completion of required reporting forms.

Children and Youth

Christian education on healthy physical, emotional, and sexual boundaries, including sexual abuse prevention, shall be offered in age appropriate ways. The purpose is to provide our children and teens with the opportunity to receive age-appropriate information in a faith-based context to help them to recognize inappropriate conduct on the part of an adult or older child.

This should also empower them to say no, and tell a “safe adult” at church, home, or school.

Parents and other Congregants

Child Abuse Awareness education will be offered periodically for parents and other congregants. This shall include information about the spiritual, as well as psychological and physical impact of abuse.

PASTORAL CARE OF INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES

1. Pastoral support will be offered to all parties involved in a child abuse complaint. This includes those who have made the complaint, the alleged

abuser, the families of both, other persons directly affected, and the congregation. Decisions about how this support will be given will be made by pastoral staff and the Session.

2. If the allegations involve pastoral staff, the ministry of the church will need to be maintained while the issue is being addressed. Decisions regarding how this will be accomplished will be made by the Session with assistance from the Presbytery.

Our congregation acknowledges that there are many victims who may be affected by an incident or a suspicion of child abuse or neglect. We are mindful that the following persons will require the proper response, care, counseling and support following any such event:

- Family members of the harmed child, youth, or vulnerable adult
- Peers of child, youth or vulnerable adult
- Peers of the child's or youth's or vulnerable adult's parents
- Remaining workers of children, youth, or vulnerable adult programs
- Congregation as a community of faith
- Family of the accused abuser

We believe that failure to address the issues of suffering, anger, fear, and grief that can occur within the church after abuse can have extended and unnecessary consequences for everyone. We will not hide or shrink away from our responsibility to promptly and appropriately address any incident of abuse. As a congregation, we are committed to the prevention of and termination of behaviors which contribute to the cycle of abuse. The following represents the steps we will take to assure that the congregation and those affected may be restored to a feeling of well-being and justice.

a. Truth telling is the most important component in post-loss recovery. Our communications will be honest, measured, and respectful of all parties involved. Written communication will be factual and will work to dispel rumor and innuendo. We will assure the congregation of the steps taken to secure the safety of the victim and to resume the functions of the ministries and programs.

b. The Session may host a planned congregational meeting so that members can attend to learn about the church's response to substantiated allegation of abuse. The meeting will be led by appropriate senior clergy, lay leaders and Presbytery representatives. A non-member Counselor will be available to address attendee questions and feelings.

c. A Task Force will be established to determine how our congregation will adapt its ongoing ministries to appropriately acknowledge and recover from the incident. Educational programs in various forums (adult, youth, and children's Sunday School programs, Thursday night programs, choirs, standing committees, staff) will be implemented to promote healing, justice, education and restored worship.

d. The Child Protection Committee will work closely with the Task Force and clergy to modify any procedures and policies based upon incident outcomes and to diligently engage in every effort to prevent further incidents of abuse and neglect.

Response Procedures

A Response Team selected by the Pastors and Session shall provide pastoral care, including but not limited to the making of referrals, seeking of aid and care if needed, and providing comfort. Nonexclusive examples of such pastoral care may include contacting the Session to request funds to pay for counseling; providing transportation; and giving lists of appropriate professionals whose assistance might be available.

Whenever confidentiality is required under these rules and procedures, it is expressly understood that members of Response Team are subject to any requirements of the secular law. This particularly includes any requirements that sexual or physical abuse of children or incapacitated adults will be reported to appropriate authorities.

Care for the Congregation

In our congregation we take every precaution we possibly can to protect our children; however, we have to recognize that incidents may occur. These situations can have a tremendous impact on the individuals, as well as the entire congregation. To help the community of faith deal with this betrayal of trust, there are four main components necessary for the healing process:

- Truth telling. For healing to begin the silence must be broken by acknowledging what has happened. Ignoring the issue could only make things worse.
- Sharing and validation of feelings. There are many emotions that surround the betrayal of trust: shock, anger, disbelief, and fear. In order to help the community of faith acknowledge and validate these feelings as

well as find some resolution, we encourage group mediation with a trained sexual abuse pastoral counselor.

- Education. Commitment to the safety and well being of children and youth is our number one priority. We have to communicate that commitment to the congregation in order for trust to be re-established. We also must reeducate members on how collectively we can protect our children.

- Spiritual reflection. In a community of faith we turn to God for guidance and direction, especially during difficult times. We turn to Scripture, like the words Paul gave to the Colossians during crisis, or the comforting words of Psalm 23. We pray that the "peace of Christ will rule in our hearts." We turn to God in prayer and emphasize the grace of Jesus Christ that will lift us up and love us forever.

Pastoral care will help the congregation to answer questions, such as, "What else do we have to do in order to be able to heal? As a congregation and as the body of Christ, where do we go from here? What do we need to do to mend ourselves so that we can go about the mission of the church — which is to glorify and serve God?"

NURSERY AND CLASSROOM GUIDELINES

Employee and Volunteer Guidelines for the nursery:

All employees must have up-to-date health records and appropriate vaccines.

There will be a sign up sheet for the nursery, asking for name, age of child, along with any additional important information (snacks, allergies) and the name(s) of parent. Children of visitors will only be released to those whose names have been listed.

No child will be left unsupervised.

Younger children will be accompanied to the bathroom. If this means that only one worker is left in the nursery, then that worker must remain visible in the doorway until the second worker returns. Older children may be sent to the restroom in pairs. Nursery workers will maintain visual contact with

them (watching for them to go in and come out) while they are down the hall.

Only parents and nursery staff will perform diapering. Staff must wash hands with soap and water after each diaper changes.

Non-soft toys played with during Sunday School and church must be left on the floor and sprayed with a Clorox spray before being returned to their storage spaces.

All nursery staff will be trained and will sign a document indicating their understanding of the above procedures.