

Child Protection Policy



WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
2701 Cameron Mills Road
Alexandria, VA 22302

POLICY FOR PROTECTION OF CHILDREN AGAINST SEXUAL ABUSE AND MISCONDUCT

PURPOSE

To further its goal of providing a safe, nurturing environment for children, Westminster Presbyterian Church has established a policy to reduce the risk of child sexual abuse or misconduct.

This policy shall be distributed to all current members of Westminster and will be provided to new members.

DEFINITION

A "child" or "children" means those less than 18 years of age.

Child sexual abuse or misconduct includes touching or non-touching interaction between a child and another child, or between a child and an adult, for the purpose of sexual stimulation. This behavior is always considered forced when the interaction involves a child and an adult, whether or not the child has consented.

STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

- Paid and volunteer adults and youth helpers shall not touch, interact with, or otherwise communicate with children in any way that is intended to be sexually stimulating. Common expressions of affection (hugs), affirmation (pats on the back), support (prayers), or physical caretaking (changing diapers, toileting, etc.), are appropriate in this community of caring Christians. Care must be taken, however, that expressions of affection and affirmation are not excessive or imposed upon a child. Care must also be taken that adults do not act in a sexually stimulating way in front of children during any Church activity.
- For activities on Church premises, adults working with children should work in pairs, or occasionally with a youth helper. On the rare occasions that a teacher or other adult must unexpectedly work alone, there must be a visual access to the classroom (door with window, or open door) at all times.
- Children involved in a Church-sponsored activity should be transported in groups rather than alone. A single adult should not drive a single child without the permission of the child's parent or guardian; when practicable, parental permission should be obtained in writing.
- For activities off Church premises (e.g., retreats), it is preferred to have adults who are working with children work at least in pairs. On those occasions when one-on-one counseling or social interaction is appropriate, the adult should notify another adult where he/she and the child will be.

SUPERVISION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- Education, fellowship, and music programs for children (including the Westminster Weekday Preschool) are under the supervision of the Christian Education Committee and the Worship Committee, which shall have responsibility for implementing this policy. Members of these committees and their staff advisors will seek volunteers in sufficient numbers to allow staffing of the programs as stated above.
- Communication and explanation of this policy will be included annually in all training and orientation programs for volunteers working with children. All such volunteers and any childcare providers must sign an acknowledgment that they have read and understood the policy.
- As a condition of employment, and prior to any offer of employment, any staff member called and employed by Westminster Presbyterian Church or Westminster Weekday Preschool will be required to state whether he/she has ever been convicted of a crime involving child sexual abuse or misconduct, as defined in this policy statement, and undergo a criminal records background check with the Virginia state police. All staff must sign an acknowledgment that they have read and understood the policy.
- In connection with acceptance of their annual salary letters, all staff must sign a statement acknowledging that they have reviewed and understand the policy.

REPORTING OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE OR MISCONDUCT

- A person who has reason to believe that sexual abuse or misconduct covered by this policy has occurred shall immediately report such information to the staff person supervising the activity and to the Pastor. It is Westminster's policy to report all allegations of sexual abuse or misconduct involving children to the appropriate government authority as required by law. Westminster will cooperate fully with government authorities in the investigation of allegations of child sexual abuse or misconduct.
- The Pastor will inform the Session that an allegation has been made and reported. Those persons involved in the investigation or report should hold relevant information in strict confidence, subject to such disclosures as are required by Church procedures or required by law. As appropriate, the Pastor also will inform the Presbytery.

Approved by Session, October 25, 1995